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**BRIDGING ART AND THE MAINSTREAM: THE CINEMA OF  
CHANG TSO-CHI**

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**BRIDGING ART AND THE MAINSTREAM: THE CINEMA OF  
CHANG TSO-CHI**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

*To my family in Taiwan*

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**BRIDGING ART AND THE MAINSTREAM: THE CINEMA OF  
CHANG TSO-CHI**

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This dissertation traces the development of New Taiwanese Cinema (NTC) in Taiwan's film system at the turn of the new millennium. Using Chang Tso-Chi's cinema as a case study, I argue that Chang represents the second-generation NTC directors who continue the movement started by the first-generation NTC directors that began filmmaking in the 1980s.

Although many of the second-generation NTC directors have produced only a few films since the mid-1990s, Chang not only sustains extensive film production, he also has produced a significant number of films that won critical acclaim at international film festivals as well as garnered domestic audience's attention. These films demonstrate how the NTC has developed into a new phase that increasingly engages the local audience in conversations about narrative—how a story can be visually told and how to weave these conversations into discussions about social issues. This active engagement with local audiences also appeals generally to audiences in other East Asian societies, especially

those that share with Taiwan similar historical experiences of forced modernity in the twentieth century. Chang's films target audiences in East Asian societies, portraying Taiwan as a unique culture in a globalizing world.

In the first chapter, I examine Chang's use of cut or fade to black with other continuity editing techniques to show why his films are critically acclaimed at East Asian film festivals. In the second chapter, I investigate how elements of magic realism that Chang uses in his film helped spur a resurgence of local reception. In the third chapter, I situate Chang's film in the discussion on the creation of Taiwanese identity, a movement that receives intense attention among Taiwanese young adults.

Chang's cinema offers us an indispensable reference point for understanding the evolution of filmmaking in local film markets in East Asia. As globalization continues in the first half of the twenty-first century, Chang's cinema showcases how a new kind of auteur can sustain filmmaking in terms of both finances and aesthetics. He represents his generation's search for a new strategy and style of filmmaking for the new epoch in East Asian cinema.

## Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	xii
Introduction Positioning Chang Tso-Chi and His Cinema .....	1
Project Framework.....	10
Chang Tso-Chi in His Early Years .....	16
Situating Cinema in a New Epoch.....	20
Chang Tso-Chi and Film Festivals .....	28
Chang Tso-Chi and His Films .....	35
Conclusion .....	39
Chapter One <i>Ah Chung</i> (1996) and <i>Darkness and Light</i> (1999): From Cuts to Fades into black.....	42
Introduction.....	42
A Solid Black Screen.....	48
Uncovering Sense in visual Style .....	50
From the Climax to No Simple Resolution through Cut to Black.....	58
Acquiring a New Sense of Film Narrative through Cuts to Black .....	65
Cuts to Black: A Rhythmic Punctuation.....	72
Fades to Black: Uncovering the Interplays of Audio and Visual Experiences .....	74
Interplays of Cuts and Fades to Black: Tuning into Rhythm.....	80
Fades to Black and Landscape Shots: Opening up Space between Visual Shots .....	83
From Cuts to Fades to Black: A Point to Finding Meaning .....	94
Chapter Two Finding a Way Home: "Magic" and "Realism" in <i>The Best of Times</i> (2002).....	97
Introduction.....	97
A Cinema of Realism.....	103
The Employment of "Magical" Elements .....	118
<i>The Best of Time</i> (2002) .....	128
I-Narrator: To Provoke a Social Change .....	140

Pitching at "Glocal" Audiences across East Asia .....	149
Chapter Three Narrative Identity in Chang Tso-Chi's <i>Soul of a Demon</i> (2007)..	151
Introduction.....	151
The Recovery of the History of Taiwan under Japanese Rule in the New Taiwanese Cinema .....	156
The New Taiwanese Cinema: An Emerging Public Sphere .....	166
<i>Soul of a Demon</i> (2008).....	174
An Unspoken Search for Identity .....	176
Locating the Structures of Feeling: Narrative, Memory, and Identity.....	188
Conclusion .....	199
Conclusion Persistent Resistance from the Margin .....	201
Introduction.....	201
Of Another Cinema .....	203
Chang Tso-Chi and East Asia .....	207
Reconsidering National Cinema .....	211
Scholarship on the NTC and Its Descendents .....	213
Bibliography .....	214

## List of Figures

Figure 1:	Montage of three shots before <i>Ah Chung's</i> opening ends.....	55
Figure 2:	Montages of four landscape shots establishing the locality of Ah Chuang’s story .....	56
Figure 3:	Montage of four shots capturing a murder scene in <i>Ah Chung</i> .....	61
Figure 4:	Montage of shots capturing the crime scene after the murder is committed .....	62
Figure 5:	Montage transitioning from the murder scene to how Ah Chuang and his family respond to the murder .....	66
Figure 6:	Montage of <i>Ah Chung's</i> opening.....	70
Figure 7:	Montage of <i>Ah Chung's</i> close .....	70
Figure 8:	The opening of <i>Darkness and Light</i> .....	75
Figure 9:	Montage introducing Kang-Yi to the audience for the first time.....	79
Figure 10:	A shot of atrium appears after the scenes that introduce Kang-Yi and Ping to audiences respectively .....	84
Figure 11:	Montage showing how Kang-yi mourns for the loss of her father and Ping. ....	91
Figure 12:	Jie shows Min how he makes a coin disappear.....	134
Figure 13:	Jie and his brother Ji eat at the same table with Wei's family .....	135
Figure 14:	Wei's living community is located at the edge of an urban city.....	138
Figure 15:	A unicorn appears when Min asks Jie to make happen what she wishes in mind .....	144

Figure 16:	Neighbors of the community provide their testimonies to the rescue team. ....	147
Figure 17:	Wei and Jie jump in the ditch to escape from pursuit of the rival gang .....	147
Figure 18:	A family photo of Yizhe (top left) is taken as soon as he returns home .....	177
Figure 19:	Yizhe's father meets Yizhe's grandfather for the first time .....	180
Figure 20:	Yizhe meets with his father for the first time in the film.....	183
Figure 21:	Yizhe's father (the first person on the right) asks his friend to give Yizhe the cooking knife.....	186
Figure 22:	Yizhe was hunted down and threw his cry in the bamboo grove ...	193
Figure 23:	Pei is keeping her diary. on her diary, she writes down what Yizhe says to her and her interpretation of his sayings .....	194
Figure 24:	Yizhe tells the story about how his parents met and established a family without a wedding ceremony .....	196
Figure 25:	Yizhe asks a group of indigenous children who are locals to the Orchid Island about a person, named Shimaderum .....	198

## **Introduction**

### **Positioning Chang Tso-Chi and His Cinema**

When a new generation of filmmakers entered Taiwan's film industry in the late 1980s and made their debut films in the 1990s, these newcomers did believe that they were carrying on a task that had a historical provenance: they were working in the tradition of Taiwan's first-generation directors of what was known as New Taiwanese Cinema, a Chinese-language cinema that represented East Asian viewpoints beyond the familiar narratives offered in the PRC Chinese and Japanese films that had achieved broad circulation in East Asia and sometimes globally.

The New Taiwanese Cinema (NTC thereafter) that I take as the contexts for my project is a new cinema produced by a small group of young filmmakers, a cinema that achieved visibility as something different in Taiwan during the 1980s. These young directors were in agreement that they needed to use filmmaking as a form of self-expression and social critique within their culture. Chang Tso-Chi (b. 1961) was one of the newcomers in the second generation NTC filmmakers who inherited and shared this perspective on filmmaking and continued this task. As this is the first extended project dedicated to Chang Tso-Chi and his cinema—the second generation of the NTC, I intend not only to introduce the second generation NTC directors to English-speaking academia but also to suggest that the study of the NTC needs to continue as a cutting edge field of

research whose development has taken off in the past two decades.<sup>1</sup> The NTC, in its two generations, has figured out how to move beyond both state-supported nationalist and utterly commercial film production, and to create a new, almost "indie" film production model within extant East Asian and global film industries.

Studies about NTC have made Hou Hsiao-Hsien (b. 1947) and Tsai Ming-Liang (b. 1957) two of the first generation NTC directors best known in English academia. A handful of academic publications that center on these two directors establish their *auteur* status in response to an existing trend of constructing world cinema masters. Song Hwee Lim's *Tsai Ming-liang and a Cinema of Slowness* (2014) and James Udden's *No Man an Island: The Cinema of Hou Hsiao-hsien* (2009) are books that help construct their *auteur* status and are all published by university presses.

Ang Lee (b. 1954) is also considered part of this first-generation cohort since the way he began his film career—his first three film productions—is identical to the path taken by his peers. He later relocated to the United States and, since the mid-1990s, has been based in a film production system that differs from Taiwan's. The drastic change in his production models, from the context of the NTC to the global Hollywood system, makes him an anomalous case study that continues to be approached by film scholars from an *auteur* perspective. Whitney Dilley's *The Cinema of Ang Lee: The Other Side of the Screen* (2007) and Yeh Chiku's *Frame Imagery Expression in Ang Lee's Films: From Text, Culture to Cross-Culture* (2012) are examples of such contribution, and both are

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<sup>1</sup> The first and by far the only second-generation director from the NTC known in English academia is Tsai Ming-Liang. A handful of English publications dedicated to his cinema were published in the 2000s and early 2010s.

published by university-related publishers. Other first generation NTC directors include Edward Yang (b. 1947) and Wang Toon (b. 1942), whose films are also critically acclaimed at international film festivals, but they have not received as much attention in academia as their peers have. John Anderson's *Edward Yang* (2005), published by University of Illinois Press, is one of the Contemporary Film Directors series that aims to introduce Edward Yang and his films to a general film audience. *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island* (2005) written by Yeh Yueh-yu and Darrell Davis is also published by a university press, and its focus on films made by Edward Yang, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Ang Lee, and Tsai Ming-liang show how the auteur's approach to the first generation NTC directors remains mainstream in this field.

Academic publications about the NTC demonstrate that an *auteur* approach to the first generation NTC directors is essential, but the original context in which the NTC was born—the historical, cultural, and industrial changes—and its relationship to Taiwanese cinema, a field of cultural production that included many industry considerations, began to demand different approaches in scholarly works. Ru-shou Chen's *Taiwan xindianying de lishi wenhua jingyan* (1993), Lu Fei's *Taiwan dianying: zhengzhi, jingji, meixue* (1998), and Hong Guo-Juin's *Taiwan Cinema: A Contested Nation on the Screen* (2013) are books that respond to this emerging trend. They show attempts to fill the gaps before and after the construction of NTC as a field of study in academia and to take into account Taiwan's film history. These books offer mostly descriptive rather than analytical content

due to an insufficient collection of systematic data about Taiwan's film industry.<sup>2</sup> The construction of these materials is in the preliminary stage and are only the tip of the iceberg compared to the auteur approach to NTC directors that remains favored by scholars. This situation is commonly seen in studies of cinemas in East Asian societies, as scholars from these societies face a similar plight. The approach that Rey Chow takes to conduct her research on contemporary Chinese cinema in her work, *Primitive Passion* (1995), is an example of how a close reading of Chinese *auteurs'* works and using film as a text to understand social agents in a given society continue to remain the leading trend in academic studies of Chinese films.

In addition to Chang Tso-chi, second generation NTC directors also include Chen Yu-shun (b.1962), Yee Chin-yen (b.1959-), and Lin Cheng-sheng (b.1959), among others. Unlike Chang Tso-chi, who chose to stay in Taiwan's film production industry and sustain filmmaking during the past three decades, they left this industry and essentially ceased filmmaking. They entered the television production industry at the turn of the new millennium to produce television programs and commercials. During the recent years of Taiwan's film renaissance, they returned to the film production industry to produce various feature films, but it has now been over ten years since they made their last films. The fact that many in Chang's generation moved out of the film production industry makes Chang's continuous career unusual. A study of his work offers a unique opportunity to track patterns in Taiwanese cinema over the past few decades that the

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<sup>2</sup> Lu's book offers an appendix of data about Taiwan's film industry from the 1980s to the mid-1990s, but his data are not systematic enough to yield any constructive analyses.

works of other directors, with their interrupted careers, cannot provide. Chang's works, therefore, provide a continuous point of measurement for how the NTC has evolved in unique and valuable ways.

Chang Tso-Chi chose to stay in the film production industry to sustain filmmaking due to his embrace of one definition of authorship, an idea that upholds *art*—filmmaking—as an individual expression. The homepage of his studio website is covered with the faces of film *auteurs*.<sup>3</sup> This collage of headshots shows his acknowledgement of the cinematic traditions that these film *auteurs* established with their films. His pursuit and establishment of his distinctive film career has also been driven by his tribute to these *auteurs*.

This idea of authorship as an aesthetic principle was introduced to Taiwan during the 1960s through the literary modernism movement, and it began to influence a group of young filmmakers that initiated the NTC in the 1980s; since the 1990s, it has been a leading ideology in Taiwan's film production industry. Although many of Chang's peers have interrupted filmmaking careers, their works uphold this idea of *auteur*--of the film director as an author with a distinctive style and voice.<sup>4</sup> Logically speaking, using filmmaking for individual expression invites questions about the definitions of what art is, what culture is, and what quality is (aside from the question of film as an industry project). In the terms suggested by *auteur* theories, these definitions should vary according to different niche audiences. However, some of these definitions often also

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<sup>3</sup> Chang Tso-Chi dianying gongzuoshi youxian gongsi (27 April 2014) <http://www.changfilm.com.tw/> (accessed 27 July 2014)

<sup>4</sup> My interview with Director Yee Chin-Yen (2 June 2013) and Director Chen Yin-Jung (3 June 2013).

become the criteria for the film system's support of certain types of films that conform to an ideal that has become the public face of a national culture.

As I will trace in the chapters below, Taiwan's film system has tended to favor individual film directors whose works become recognized at international film festivals, because criteria about film as *art* was never established from within the Taiwanese system before the emergence of the NTC—Taiwanese film had always been either commercial or propaganda. It is Chang Tso-Chi who has had the longest sustained career within this era of Taiwan's filmmaking, and so it is his works that show this: The fact that Chang Tso-Chi has been able to sustain filmmaking with the public and private sectors' support thus suggests that a study of his works is essential to understanding how Taiwan's film system has changed over the past three decades, especially in how it has developed successful criteria for films marked as Taiwanese and how their success has allowed an unusual national cinema to evolve and succeed, first at world film festivals, and then within East Asian film networks..

Starting around the mid-1990s, Chang Tso-Chi entered Taiwan's film industry through an apprenticeship, working under several respected directors of the first generation.<sup>5</sup> During his apprenticeship, he observed how their new cinema (*xindianying*) had become a synonym for art cinema (*yishu dianying*) and for a cinema producing box office bombs (*piaofang duyao*). These terms were commonly used in Taiwan's mass

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<sup>5</sup> These directors are Hou Hsiao-Hsien, Yu Kan-Ping, and Tsui Hark.

media to criticize the NTC and the first-generation NTC directors.<sup>6</sup> After a manifesto drafted and signed by a group of the first-generation NTC film workers was published in early 1987, many film workers from the first-generation cohorts, including those who openly supported the manifesto, ceased filmmaking.<sup>7</sup> Taiwan as a political and economic entity had moved beyond martial law in 1987, but the nationally supported filmmaking in which the NTC had emerged was under threat.

Those who chose to stay in the film production industry in this era of diminishing state support found ways to sustain their filmmaking by relying on the resources offered by international film festivals—they let the international market drive their cultural production. As I will discuss below, the remaining first-generation NTC directors were able to win international acclaims at film festivals but faced a hostile market domestically. This hostility resulted from the seemingly self-sustaining bias prevalent in defining Taiwan's film culture in terms of mass media—art films are made for film festivals, but mainstream films are made for a "general" audience, often global or transnational. The first generation of NTC's filmmakers faced the challenge of promoting their films in the local film market, but did not always succeed.

During this time, Chang made his film debut and joined his predecessors in affirming the viability of Taiwanese cinema, even in a time where funding changed. His cinema—spanning from post-martial-law Taiwan (the 1990s) to the first two decades of

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<sup>6</sup> Peggy Chiao's *Taiwan xindianying* (Taipei: Shibao, 1988) and Li Youxin's *dianying, dianyingren, dianying kanwu* (Taipei: Zili wanbao, 1986) are two collections of articles that are dedicated to diversifying readers' understanding of films made for more than consumption and entertainment. Academic studies, such as Ma Ya-Chi's master thesis (2002) and Kao Li-Han's journal article (2013), that investigate the complex relations between a Taiwanese film and its box office results were published fairly recently.

<sup>7</sup> Xiaoye, Wu Nien-Jen, and Zhang Yi are examples.

the twenty-first century (the 2010s)—rests on the documented historical continuity among three generations of Taiwanese film workers who shared a commitment to Taiwan's film and whom he acknowledges as his formative influences.<sup>8</sup>

It is my intention to use Chang Tso-Chi's story to challenge the seemingly self-evident dichotomy between art and mainstream cinema that exists in so much film scholarship. By putting Chang Tso-Chi and his films into the context of Taiwan's film culture at the turn of the new millennium, I intend to rectify this misconception and to propose reconsidering the role of film in the era where audience's reception of cinemas becomes even globalized. In this age of full-fledged mass production, Taiwan's film industry has undergone a series of reforms driven by the uneven developments between the industries of film production and release in Taiwan.<sup>9</sup> The polarized developments of Taiwan's film industry are, in fact, prime motivators in Chang Tso-Chi's continuing attempts to situate his cinema as both relating to Taiwan and as accessible to local and regional audiences. Although industry changes did push many local filmmakers to leave the film industry in the 1990s, Chang Tso-Chi is the newcomer who points to way to methods for surviving these challenges and continues to find ways to produce films that are both original and under his control. He often actively participates in different stages of filmmaking, such as script writing, fundraising for production, postproduction, promotion and release, etc. These practices push him to acknowledge and adapt to the

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<sup>8</sup> Lin Wen-Chi and Yuyan Wang, et al. *Taiwan dianying de shengyin (Voices of Taiwan Films)* (Taipei: Bookman, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Dai yazhen, "Dianyingfa gongtinghui jueyi guopian yingyan baozhang rufa," *Central News Agency* (9 Apr. 2015) <http://www.cna.com.tw/news/aip1/201504090367-1.aspx> (accessed on 25 May 2015)

changing trends in the circuits of film festivals and to acquire tactics to sustain his filmmaking in this new epoch.

The timing of this study on Chang Tso-Chi and his cinema is noteworthy. The international visibility and reception of Taiwanese cinema stumbled to a record low point in the 1990s but slowly resurged during the first decade of the twenty-first century. The survival tactics that Chang adopted enabled him to stay in the film industry long enough to participate in another boom of local film production.<sup>10</sup> During this boom, Chang's films enjoyed critical acclaims at international film festivals while experiencing moderate successes in the local film market. His continuous practice of filmmaking allowed his cinema to stand out in this recent boom, just as it offers a red thread that we can follow to see how the East Asian film markets have been changing.

Chang Tso-Chi's cinema represents the most recent trends of how the second generation NTC directors produce, distribute, and exhibit their films. Many in the youngest generation—the third generation—NTC filmmakers have just made their film debuts and are not established enough for scholars to formulate profiles of them. Thus, it is critical to use Chang Tso-Chi as a nodal point to connect the first generation with the most recent third generation of filmmakers by studying Taiwanese cinema at the turn of the new millennium. His works offer scholars an example of how a small and creative studio could survive during the time when the local film industry went into hibernation.

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<sup>10</sup> Zhang Qiongfang, "Guanzhong huilaile!—guopian fuxing yundong," *Taiwan Panorama* (May 2012): 30.

This introduction is structured to introduce the problem and context of filmmaking in which Chang Tso-Chi works. The first section below will discuss the problem presented by Taiwan film industry in a globalizing situation. Subsequent sections introduce Chang himself, and the problems he takes up in his filmmaking. The final section of this introduction will lay out the structure of this approach.

### **Project Framework**

Since the commencement of the NTC studies at the turn of the new millennium, ideas about globalization have dominated discussions about it. This perspective is based on the reception patterns of the NTC. The first-generation NTC directors and their films targeted consisted as their market a small group of domestic-niche audiences and a larger group of international audiences that converged at film festivals. In a book chapter, Wu Chia-Chi confirms that the reception of this new cinema in the local film market remained small, and that its establishment became possible because it caught the globalizing trends that western film festivals adopted.<sup>11</sup> Wu's argument reveals the importance of timing for a film's success but also leads us to question how western film festivals suddenly became interested in the New Taiwanese Cinema during the 1980s.

It was not a sudden discovery. Integrating New Taiwanese Cinema into world cinema did not come out of thin air, it was a process that began in the second half of the twentieth century. Several Asian directors from the region had begun to garner attention

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<sup>11</sup> Wu Chia-Chi, "Festivals, criticism and international reputation of Taiwan New Cinema," *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity, and State of the Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2007): 90-92.

from European film festivals since the 1950s. According to the order of their introduction to and recognition in the west, the cinema of Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, and South Korea were integrated into the map of World Cinema one after another. Academic publications about these film cultures also followed this order.<sup>12</sup> Through these auteurs, film cultures from these economic entities and their films have been gradually introduced to international audiences for half of the century.

As western film festivals globalized in integrating the NTC into their programs in order to create an imagination of “world cinema,” this imagination represented a form of globalization where these Asian *auteurs* and their cinemas were often compared to western *auteurs* and their cinematic traditions.<sup>13</sup> Recent academic publications that adopt this approach to evaluating Asian cinemas suggest that this form of globalization has become widely recognized. However, this definition of globalization implicitly emphasizes a one-way flow of west-centered cultural production toward the periphery of the world system, East Asia.

This paradigm of cultural flows, with cultural products following patterns of economic dominance, are being reassessed in light of increasing multi-directional flows of media imagery, as Joseph Straubhaar and Michael Curtin have delineated in their

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<sup>12</sup> Burch's *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in Japanese Cinema* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979) is one of the first few academic publications about Japanese cinema. These books were published in the 1970s. “East Asian Cinema: A Selected Bibliography of Materials in the UC Berkeley Library,” *The Library, at the University of California, Berkeley*, University of California, Berkeley (5 June 2012) <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/cjkfilmibib.html#books> (accessed on 27 May 2015)

<sup>13</sup> “East Asian Cinema: A Selected Bibliography of Materials in the UC Berkeley Library,” *The Library, at the University of California, Berkeley*, University of California, Berkeley (5 June 2012) <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/cjkfilmibib.html#books> (accessed on 27 May 2015)

articles. Straubhaar reveals that the new patterns of flow should not be construed as multilateral in the exchange of programming between sovereign states; instead, he directs our attention to flows that emanate from particular cities that are interdependent, drawing a pattern of networked nodes rather than national economies.<sup>14</sup> Curtin offers three media capitals as case studies to demonstrate how nodal points of cultural networks are places where a generation of new mass culture forms make it possible to invite future studies to account for all factors and influences, including but not excluding economic and national forces, that shape a media capital.<sup>15</sup>

In light of the reassessment of the one-way dissemination of globalization that Straubhaar and Curtin advocate, a handful of academic publications on Asian media cultures released around the same time also asked their readers to be extra cautious about this growing understanding of globalization. Although western cinematic traditions and practices remain the leading influences on those who reside outside of this region this understanding of globalization risks ignoring the radical reforms that these auteurs try to accomplish through their cinematic practices by removing them from their original contexts. In Koichi Iwabuchi's book, he presents an alternative understanding of globalization by situating Japanese cultural products in an intra-regional context.<sup>16</sup>

My dissertation will continue to grapple with the ideas of globalization by following a handful of academic publications that challenge the understanding of

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph Straubhaar, "Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity," 6.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Curtin, "Media Capital: Towards the Study of Spatial Flows," 205-206.

<sup>16</sup> Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentring Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 16-18.

globalization where the west remains at the center. The framework that I adopt in my study of Chang Tso-Chi and his cinema is one that situates Taiwan in the context of East Asia.. Taiwan was under Japanese rule in the first half of the twentieth century and under the Chinese Nationalists' rule in the second half of the century. This modern history of Taiwan is a result of imperial histories, and the decolonization of these imperial histories has been stalled by the Cold War. In Chen Kuan-Hsing's book, he analyzes the dynamic forces of modern East Asian history and reveals that the work of deimperialization is impossible to imagine in imperial centers such as the United States and Japan.<sup>17</sup> This makes those on both sides of the imperial divide—Taiwan and China, South Korea and North Korea—particular interesting case studies. He insists that studies about these economic entities have to access the conduct, motives, and consequences of the imperial histories. In this sense, my case study of Chang Tso-Chi and his cinema is significant in beginning these assessments.

Today, western scholars often assume that “New Taiwanese Cinema is dead” because only the first-generation NTC directors and their works continue to garner attention from western film festival curators. They are not aware of a younger set of voices. Additionally, the pragmatic programming logic prevailing at film festivals still leads organizers to present some sort of mythical totality of world cinema. Jean-Michael Frodon, a film festival curator, once said, “one film director from Taiwan is enough.”<sup>18</sup> I argue that NTC is not dead but is continued by a second generation of filmmakers who

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<sup>17</sup> Chen Kuan-Hsing, *Asian as a Method: Toward Deimperialisation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 7-18.

<sup>18</sup> James Tweedie, “Edward Yang and Taiwan's Age of Auteurs,” *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Cinemas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013): 422.

find ways to sustain filmmaking and circulate their works in a different network. Two generations of young Taiwanese young have followed the first-generation NTC directors' paths and continued what they have begun. A major reason why western scholars pay less attention to these younger directors is because these newcomers do not circulate their films in the same network as these older directors do.

What are the alternative networks these followers explore so that they can continue to reach out to international audiences? Chang Tso-chi represents the second generation of NTC directors not only because he is one of the followers that sustains the practice of filmmaking even today but also because the network he uses to circulate his films centers on East Asia rather than the west. He often receives invitations to international film festivals in East Asia and collects major awards at these film festivals. These film festivals are held annually in Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan.

This alternative network that Chang finds to circulate his film and the network the first generation NTC directors uses are not mutually exclusive. For example, after Chang's *Darkness and Night* (1999) collected three major awards at the Tokyo International Film Festival, the film was selected for the Director's Fortnight section at the Cannes International Film Festival. This non-competitive section was formed in the immediate aftermath of May 1968 to "defend artistic, moral, professional and economic freedom in filmmaking, and to participate in the development of new cinema structures."<sup>19</sup> The connection between these two networks is a shared goal—to show how

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<sup>19</sup> Scott Foundas, "Cannes 2008: A Brief History of the Directors' Fortnight," *LA Weekly* (14 May 2008) <http://www.laweekly.com/film/cannes-2008-a-brief-history-of-the-directors-fortnight-2153525> (accessed on 27 May 2015)

“new cinema” can continue to sustain filmmaking as a social practice in its original context and to demonstrate to other filmmakers that filmmaking is an act of creating art.

Films made by the first generation NTC directors and by other Asian directors known in the west are regularly circulated in the international film festivals held in East Asia. These films are also popularly circulated among filmmakers and local film festival audiences. They present a set of cinematic traditions for Chang to carry on in his films and to break away from in order to establish his unique style.

Reception of such films is thus critical in understanding how these films function.<sup>20</sup> The global domination of Hollywood filmmaking in different local film markets occurred in many economic networks from 1990 to 2000, and Taiwan can straightforwardly be considered among them.<sup>21</sup> Toby Miller’s concept of “New International Division of Cultural Labour” suggests that international audiences for global Hollywood need not be considered as consumers who seek entertainment but rather need to be seen as laborers—viewers who contribute the labor of watching Hollywood productions in order to assist the circulation of capital production.<sup>22</sup> Miller’s concept highlights the leading role that Hollywood has occupied in the global film industry system, but he ignores dynamics that the local film culture encompasses in

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<sup>20</sup> Holub’s *Reception Theory* (1984), Habermas’s *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989), and Staiger’s *Perverse Spectators* (2000) are books that inspire me to reconsider the increasing attention “audience” receives in Taiwan’s film culture at the turn of the new millennium. They lead me to ponder over the connotations hidden behind the “importance of audience”—a naturally assumed stand that dominates film reviews and scholarly articles, whether these articles support or berate New Taiwanese Cinema.

<sup>21</sup> Toby Miller, et al. *Global Hollywood* (London: BFI, 2001): 3-4.

<sup>22</sup> Toby Miller, “The crime of Monsieur Lang: GATT, the screen and the new international division of cultural labour,” *Film Policy: International, National, and Regional Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1996): 75.

resisting this dominant trend. This resistance may appear small-scale, but it can't be ignored. As we shall see below, the attention of local audiences that three generations of the NTC directors are able to garner suggests that the local niche audience continues to closely observe local film productions.<sup>23</sup> The continuing reception of this new cinema indicates that cultivating and solidifying this niche market continues to be a challenge that Taiwanese filmmakers have to face.

### **Chang Tso-Chi in His Early Years**

Chang Tso-Chi was born in 1961 in Taiwan and was raised in a family of civil servants. He entered college during the time when directors of the NTC became filmic celebrities among college students. After he obtained an associate's degree in electronic engineering in 1982, he began to pursue his dream of filmmaking by first entering a college to receive a film education. The core courses of this education included plays, histories of western drama and theater, directing and the like. The curricula are comparable to those in English literature departments in Taiwan, paralleling to those in the U.S. they are modeled after. This film education enlightened Chang to see filmmaking as a practice of authorship and helped him to understand the pursuit of NTC directors such as Hou Hsiao-Hsien (b.1947) and Edward Yang (b.1947).

However much Chang cultivated his film literacy and acquired basic skills in filmmaking through projects at school, his practical skills came from working on actual

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<sup>23</sup> Wi Ti, "Cong zaidi zongxiang quanqiu," *Taiwan: A Radical Quarterly in Social Studies* (December, 2004): 81.

film productions. During his apprenticeship years, Chang entered a film company to do odd jobs for various teams before director Yu Kan-Ping from Taiwan recruited him to the director's team for his production of *People Between Two Chinas* (1988). This experience later drew Chang to participate in the production of *King of Chess* (1991) and allowed him to learn how to make a film within a given amount of time and funds. *King's* production showed Chang how a film is made in accordance with the producer-centered style. Tsui Hark, a Hong Kong film director who has made a series of box office hits in both Taiwan and Hong Kong, came to Taiwan to shoot this film. Chang watched how Tsui pushed his team from Taiwan to strictly follow an intensive shooting schedule planned according to the meetings that Tsui and his producer team have the night before. This sufficient shooting style conforms to producer Tsui's experience in directing mainstream films. In his interview with Teng Sui-Feng , Chang explains that producer Tsui always encouraged his production team to ignore detail problems that any technical issues may cause on a three-to-five second shot because he knows that the audience (of mainstream cinema) will hardly notice them.

After his participation in the production of *King*, he was recruited to work on Hou Hsiao-Hsien's production of *A City of Sadness* (1989), the first Chinese-language film to win best picture from the Venice Film Festival. Because of the social taboo that *A City* touches upon, Chang became one of the few followers that supported Hou in this production to the very end.<sup>24</sup> Director Hou promoted Chang to be his first assistant

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<sup>24</sup> Sylvia Lin, "Documenting the Past," *Representing Atrocity in Taiwan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 47-72.

director and gave Chang a chance to observe his shooting style closely. As he recalls in the same interview with Teng, Chang stresses how this experience not only opened his mind to a spontaneous shooting, but also shaped his perception of aesthetics. He watched how director Hou took time to ponder over the on-site scenes and asked the photographer to check the light of the scenes before he decided whether the team should proceed with the shooting scheduled for the day.

Hou's shooting style is characteristic of the director-centered mode that has long been prevalent in Taiwan.<sup>25</sup> This way of organizing the filmmaking process initially seemed to be insufficient for Chang in the beginning, but he gradually came to see it as a part of the real-life obstacles that local filmmakers have always faced.<sup>26</sup> Once he understood that director Hou was able to face the challenge posed by this seemingly insufficient shooting style and apture accurate locales to best present his imaginary of realism, Chang concentrated on putting himself in director Hou's shoes, with the task of making second-unit shots consistent with Hou's master shots. His ability to work with cuts of longer duration, landscape shots, and abstill camera with a deep focus began with this working experience and later became filmmaking habit that he consciously or unconsciously puts into practice when he makes his films.

The film education that Chang received and the two extreme shooting styles Chang experienced (one director-centered, and the other commercial) brought him to post substantial questions about filmmaking, the role of the director, who the audience is,

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<sup>25</sup> James Tweedie, "Edward Yang and Taiwan's Age of Auteurs," *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Cinemas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 421.

<sup>26</sup> Wang Yunyan, *Zaijian Edward Yang* (Taipei: Shizhou wenhua, 2012), 14-64. Chang Jinn-Pei, *Ningwang shidai: chuanyue beiqing chengshi ershinian* (Taipei: Tianyuan chengshi), 52-75, 156-169.

market(s) and the like when he continued to cultivate his own approach to filmmaking in the production of two made-for-TV documentaries. These two documentaries were two in a series about juvenile delinquency based on actual cases.<sup>27</sup> Even after he finished these two productions, he continued to be interested in juveniles. One result of his engagement was a new film: he accompanied a group of young adults on a visit to a wetland preserve that the local environmentalists were fighting to keep in order to protect the waterfowl. Visiting this preserve with his juvenile friends did not introduce Chang to the waterfowl, but rather to the residents who cannot afford to leave this place. This visit inspired Chang to make his first feature film and to present on screen how residents of this preserve, mostly people from the bottom of the social ladder, survive.<sup>28</sup>

This experience of shooting documentaries brought Chang to consider the difference between using film stock to document and to make a feature film, upon reflecting on the two shooting styles he experienced with directors Hou and Tsui. The director-centered or producer-centered mode of production indeed offered him a quick glimpse of the two film cultures that Taiwanese cinema and Hong Kong cinema respectively represent. An even more difficult question he faced is where and how he should situate his own approach to cinema. The experience of producing *Midnight Revenge* (1994) with a Hong Kong film company pushed Chang to realize that he could not compromise the integrity of his film, as would be required in a strictly commercial

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<sup>27</sup> *Nomad Juvenile Archives* (Liehuo qingchun shaonian dangan) is the title of this documentary series. Chang Tso-Chi directs two episodes *Theft* (1993) and *Gang Robbery* (1993).

<sup>28</sup> *Midnight Revenge* (1994) is technically Chang Tso-Chi's first feature film. But Chang refuses to claim it as his work because the film was edited, premiered, and released in Hong Kong without his consent.

cinema. He thus returned to Taiwan and learned how to seek funding for his film production from the local film market.

Chang tried to follow his Taiwanese predecessors' paths and looked into working with support from the Central Motion Picture Cooperation (CMPC).<sup>29</sup> With support from the CMPC, Chang would not have to worry much about promotion or release, but could focus on production. Edward Yang, Tsai Ming-liang, and even Hou Hsiao-hsien had received support from the CMPC before they established their reputations and started their production studios. However, Chang withdrew his application after a meeting with the CMPC representative, who wanted him to fix the disturbing plots he presents in his films.<sup>30</sup> He then applied for funding from the state's subsidy program and also won prize money from the state-sponsored best-script contest. By maintaining low-cost budgets, Chang has continued to draw funding from public and private sectors to produce his films independently with his studio.

### **Situating Cinema in a New Epoch**

The question Chang faced was what films he should continue making and how he could promote these films. Chang grew up watching *guopian* (national cinema) in a single-screen theater. At the time, national cinema and *xipian* (western cinema, mainly Hollywood imports) were screened in two different sets of theaters with different ticket prices. These theaters usually had one big screen with space that could seat a couple of

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<sup>29</sup> Alice Shih, "A Brief History of Taiwan's Film Industry," *CineAction* 85 (2011): 63-68.

<sup>30</sup> Teng Sue-feng. "Zhongzai de xinshi, zhangzuoji zhidao," *Taiwan Panorama* (Apr. 1997): 128-134.

hundred audience members per auditorium. The two-screen system intentionally separated the market for national cinema from that of foreign films, but this separation did not assist the local film production in achieving steady growth.

Chang always remembered that watching Hong Kong martial arts films dubbed in Mandarin was one of his favorite activities to do with his father when he was a child. His adult experience revealed a potentially fatal flaw embedded in the state's policy of assisting the local film industry to develop robustly. During the era of Taiwan's U.S.-aided economic development, state-governed agencies would regularly distribute tickets to military and government personnel for watching national cinema in theaters. These ticket distributions were intended to promote local film production and to encourage local film workers to produce popular genre films over the years. Yet, the state also considered Hong Kong's productions as national cinema during the martial-law era and granted it the same screening benefits as local productions. Owners of theaters showing national cinema were then led to choose the most profitable films from the pool of available local and Hong Kong productions. In other words, Taiwan's films had to compete with Hong Kong's in the national cinema market, outside the circuit of world commercial cinema. This competition hindered Taiwan's film industry in developing any ways of working in the mindset necessary for commercial films and prevented local production from diversifying.

When Chang was studying for his associate degree at the turn of the 1980s, local production began to lose its market to Hong Kong's productions. He witnessed the system's fatal flaw turning into a significant crisis in Taiwan's film industry. A group of

young students first published an article entitled “Shida zuijia lanpian” (Ten Best Bad Films) to reveal the tip of the iceberg, which caused an uproar in society.<sup>31</sup> They expressed sincere critique, explaining how several well-received local films could have been improved with large budgets from the state-owned CMPC. Their concern reflected the declining audience for local productions and the increasing audience for Hong Kong productions. This difference continued to grow until the CMPC finally supported a group of young local filmmakers to make a series of local productions, with the aim of winning back audiences from Hong Kong films. Some of these films became box office successes and temporarily eased this crisis.

These young filmmakers were later known as the NTC directors, and they become role models for Chang to follow. As a member of the young audiences that loved filmmaking, he looked up to these young filmmakers for several reasons. They garnered attention for Taiwan from the international arena through the awards they collected from film festivals. This publicity was especially encouraging since Taiwan’s government had faced diplomatic setbacks since the 1970s. Domestically, these awards suggested a changing view of filmmaking in Taiwan and a rise in considering it important to the nation's culture. The dominant view of filmmaking had always been to see it as a profession for turning a profit. But in these young directors’ works, filmmaking began to be also considered an act of creating artwork for the purpose of challenging social and political taboos. The act of making social critiques helped their films win awards in

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<sup>31</sup> Kao Shan-Chun, *Shida lanpian fengpo* (Taichung: Landeng wenhua, 1978), offers detailed information about the disturbance in Taiwan’s public sphere of film reviews.

international festivals and challenged the dominant view of commercial filmmaking, creating Taiwan's first distinctively local films. For Chang, these young directors' films were examples to him of what films he should make.

However, the crisis Chang witnessed gradually reappeared in various forms, threatening the development of the nascent new cinema. The sporadic success of these new cinema films could not be sustained against competition with Hong Kong's blockbusters, and these directors faced obstacles to making films that broke from formulaic genres. The CMPC's support of these young filmmakers in production and in release at the international film festivals did preserve its role in a changing economic and ideological climate, but at the same time, it implicitly restricted their production budgets, controlling their products and ultimately rendering them uncompetitive. In contrast to its continual approval of large budgets for the production of propaganda films and for the promotion of films with blockbuster potential, the CMPC's traditional methods of promotion, acquired over the years to promote its productions, did not work to establish this new cinema in the local film market—they did not have the visual appeal of high-budget films. This restriction on production budgets worsened when the CMPC's productions of these directors' works became box office failures. The print media published film reviews accusing the new cinema directors of ignoring the audience, citing this as the reason for their box office failures.<sup>32</sup> These reviews created a hostile social atmosphere toward these directors and made it harder for the CMPC to continue supporting them. The CMPC's wavering role thus also led to fewer national cinema

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<sup>32</sup> Tu Yun-Chih. "Qingbuyao 'wanwan' gupian," *Mingshengbao* (29 August 1985): 19.

theater owners supporting the screening of these films because many of them, like the majority of local filmmakers, continued to seek commercially successful films to sustain their businesses. The crisis in Taiwan's film industry appeared to be due to a significant gap between production and release/exhibition.

Promoting the new cinema became an urgent issue necessary for its survival because the number of formulaic films that occupied the screens in national cinema theaters could easily bury the new cinema films. Chang Tso-Chi's participation in director Hou's production of *A City* allowed him to glimpse how director Hou produced and promoted this film. This film was invited to the 1989 Venice Film Festival to compete for best picture and recuperated production costs from selling its overseas distribution rights during its exhibition at the festival.<sup>33</sup> When Hou returned to Taiwan with this film, his team strived to promote it as a western film.

Companies that released western films in Taiwan had always had a robust screening agreement with theater owners, including a contracted screening schedule and number of screens.<sup>34</sup> This contractual package guaranteed that the film would stay in theaters long enough to reach audiences. With the halo of "best picture" from the Venice Film Festival, its distinction as the first film that touched on a socio-political taboo, and a robust promotion package, this award-winning film became a box office hit and set a record for the highest-grossing film in Taiwan's film history. The commercial success of

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<sup>33</sup> Wu Chia-Chi, "Festivals, criticism and international reputation of Taiwan New Cinema," *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity, and State of the Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2007): 88.

<sup>34</sup> Lee Ya-Huei, *Meishang bada zai Taiwan zhi fazhan yu bianqian yanjiu (1949-1999)*, 10-15.

director Hou's *A City* showed Chang the importance of a promotion package and marketing strategy for a film to succeed in the market.

The landslide success of *A City* in the local film market and its box office revenue did not fool Chang. His working experience in the film industry enabled him to understand that *A City*'s ability to achieve both aesthetic and commercial success was a rare exception. The film festival's judges, mostly western film critics, endorsed the aesthetic success that director Hou achieved. The commercial success of this film in the local film market was determined by gross ticket revenues. A film that can stand out in both of these production and distribution contexts, driven by two different value systems, often requires meticulous planning, if not pure luck.

Many film investors, audiences, and reviewers are not aware of the complexity involved in a film crowned with both aesthetic and commercial success. For them, films made for exhibition at film festivals are not made for mass audiences. They often ignore the fact that many films, such as director Tsui's *King of Chess*, which were supposedly made for mass audiences often are box office failures. The commercial success of Hou's *A City* was not able to eradicate the social hostility against the NTC's directors or their followers. What had been audience resentment about a category of films simply grew and became a seemingly axiomatic excuse for the mass audience to bypass local films shown in theaters. Low box office revenues prevented local private investors from putting more money into the local film production industry. As it became harder and harder for film directors to focus on film production, as they instead had to worry about funding, post

production, promotion, and release at the same time, many NTC directors left the film production industry in the 1990s.

Chang Tso-Chi saw how those who chose to stay in film production relied on film festivals and other subsidies to sustain their filmmaking in the following decades. Hou Hsiao-Hsien and Edward Yang, for example, had established their reputation in international film festivals in the 1980s. Their works continued to attract film festival organizers. Domestically, they faced an even more difficult situation in reaching out to the local audience.<sup>35</sup> The multiplex revolution with global capitals pushed Taiwan's traditional theater to reform. Taiwan's government established a film subsidy program to encourage local film productions, but failed to include a policy to incorporate the film exhibition industry into the development of Taiwan's film industry as a whole.<sup>36</sup> Instead, it yielded to theater owners' plea for the abolishment of the long-running separated screening systems, to the detriment of Taiwan's collapsing film production industry. National cinema theater owners also wanted to screen western films in their theaters to increase their income in the age of multiplex cinemas. Films with abundant funding for promotion, such as Hollywood imports, Hong Kong's blockbusters, and Taiwan's local formulaic films, filled up the newly added screens for release companies and theater owners to reap the profits. Under this unitary exhibition route, Taiwan's award-winning directors and their films were easily dismissed. Because of insufficient funds for domestic promotion, these directors are sometimes unable to agree on a deal with local

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<sup>35</sup> Michael Berry, "Edward Yang: Luckily Unlucky," *Speaking in Images* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005): 272-295.

<sup>36</sup> Liang Liang, "Jiuling nian dai Taiwan dianying de zhengche," *Dianying yishu zazhi* 4 (2001): 101-104.

companies to release their award-winning films in Taiwan's theaters. Attending international film festivals became an important way for these directors to fight their way out of Taiwan's film exhibition system, reach their audience, and sustain their filmmaking.

When Chang Tso-Chi began production on his debut film, there were not many local film festivals held regularly to promote local film productions. He knew that he had to follow what his predecessors have done to attend international film festivals in order to promote his films at the lowest possible cost. But on the other hand, the low levels of production funding from the state's film subsidy program and private business sectors impelled him to take into account the local film audience. Unlike his predecessors who had established their reputation at the first-tier film festivals and sustained their film productions in that way, Chang often faced challenges when seeking funding for his film productions. A strategy he had developed was to assure his investors that he would strike a deal with a local company to always release his films in Taiwan's theaters with a guaranteed screening schedule for a month. This strategy went along with a slowly growing trend among Taiwan's exhibition industry. After the directors of the NTC made films that achieved both aesthetic and commercial successes, Taiwan's local companies gradually used festivals or awards for advertisement in order to release quality films in the local film market. Chang followed this slow growing trend with the development of local film festivals to situate his cinema between film festivals and domestic theater releases. This releasing strategy made sure that his films would reach the local audience and slowly garner its attention.

This insistence on domestic release and his conscious resistance to the dichotomy between art and mainstream cinema distinguishes Chang Tso-Chi from his NTC predecessors. His film education, apprenticeship, and filmmaking experiences cultivated his view of filmmaking and the role of film. In his interviews, he constantly stresses that there are good films and bad films. The greatest challenge he constantly faces as a film director is not to make a film for a film festival or to make a film that is a box office hit, but instead is to make a film that impresses his audiences enough to cover its costs and bring them back into the movie auditoriums. For this reason, he opposes being labelled an art cinema director.

### **Chang Tso-Chi and Film Festivals**

Film festivals based in East Asia have paid conspicuous attention to Chang Tso-Chi's films. *Midnight Revenge* was selected for the production of the film series, Edges of Greater China (*liangan sandi bianyuan xilie dianying*), and premiered at the Hong Kong Film Festival. *Ah Chung* garnered him international recognition with a Jury Special Recommendation Award from the first Pusan International Film Festival in South Korea.<sup>37</sup> *Darkness and Light* officially established his stardom in the region because it collected three major awards from the Tokyo International Film Festival in 1999. After collecting three major awards in this first-tier film festival in the region, *Darkness* was selected for the Director's Fortnight section at the Cannes International Film Festival.

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<sup>37</sup> "Chang Tso-Chi," *Taiwan dianyingwang*, n.d. [http://www.taiwancinema.com/fp\\_12439\\_39](http://www.taiwancinema.com/fp_12439_39) (accessed 10 June 2015).

This was the first time that Chang expanded his audience groups from inter-Asia markets to those in Europe and North America. *The Best of Times* eventually made it to the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival, the Chinese-language Oscars, by collecting the best picture of the year award. Chang followed the path his predecessors took in establishing his reputation outside of Taiwan before earning local recognition.

But the route Chang embarked on is distinct from that his predecessors had walked. The first-generation NTC directors had established their reputation in Europe-based film festivals before their reputation spread to other East Asian countries. This spread owed much to the *auteur* studies that film festivals had been promoting since the 1950s. After World War II, Hollywood films came to dominate various national film markets in Europe when these countries were busy with recovery from the war. This increasing domination also threatened countries that used to have a steady film production to sustain their local film market before the war. Holding regular film festivals was the contingency plan of filmmakers from these countries. Film festivals were events that catered to audiences through obscure films. They were obscure in the sense that they opened a new market distinct from that of the Hollywood imports. In contrast to Hollywood's system, *auteur*, a view that holds the director as the primary creative force in a motion picture, is the backdrop of these film festivals. This embrace of the director as *auteur* drives film festival organizers to scout out new directors outside of Europe. Interestingly, academia—the system of knowledge production—closely observes these film festival directors and the films that receive acclaim in these European film festivals. When the institutionalization of the western *auteur* reached a critical point, academics

began to search for auteur outside of Europe. The method that the first generation NTC directors used to achieve their auteur status conformed to this one-way dissemination. But how Chang worked his way up to claim this *auteur* status suggests that this one-way dissemination had become two-way, requiring attention to both marketing and film festivals.

This two-way dissemination still posed great challenges for Chang in garnering receptivity for his artworks and his reputation. The high profiles that Chang's predecessors had established were usually circulated among audience groups whose cultural and visual literacies were consistent with their social statuses. However, when film production, release, and exhibition increase in intensity, audience groups from all walks of life can have easy access to various kinds of films. This creates the chance for a second group of filmmakers, still auteurs, to offer works that reach a wider viewership. In fact, they actually face greater challenges in trying to reach audience groups whose composition is much more diverse. This change in audience composition should thus draw our attention to Chang Tso-Chi, whose work has long been represented at second-tier film festivals. He sustains the sophisticated cinematic practices that these prestigious film festivals demand for admission. His works are often able to garner attention because they win international acclaims in the region as well as attain critical success in the local film market.

Chang Tso-Chi attended the major international film festivals in East Asia for several reasons. His predecessors who were able to regularly attend first-tier film festivals usually received comprehensive support from the state. It was unlikely for him

to compete in the same circuit with only independent resources. He thus turned to the international film festivals in East Asia. These film festivals were established as counterparts to their western models and often included films for competition, premieres, special features, and so on. Many film workers who attended film festivals shared his view of filmmaking, so Chang was able to network with filmmakers from other countries in the region. Western film workers also found these festivals a great platform for making inter-regional exchanges possible. These film festivals allowed Chang to observe how international filmmakers get together to exchange ideas about filmmaking on an affordable budget. He received the benefits of film festival screenings without needing to go to the western festivals and compete directly with his mentors.

Attending these international film festivals gave Chang a better understanding as to what it means to be a filmmaker in his time. Many film industries in East Asia were faced with challenges caused by global capitalism. On one hand, they had entered into the full-fledged mass production of films. On the other hand, the world reception even towards quality films was limited. The establishment of inter-regional and local film festivals at the turn of the new millennium suggests that these countries acknowledged the contingency plan of opening a market for quality local film productions to reach its audience. These film festivals were often initiated with support from the city or the state before they became self-sustained, regular events. As a film-lover who decided to make a commitment to sustaining relevant, quality filmmaking, Chang understood that he needed to attend film festivals in order for his works to continually receive critical examination. Otherwise, he might not continue to break new ground in cinematography or film style,

as the *auteurs* favored by the juries of the first-tier film festivals did. His works, like his regional counterparts, have sustained interest for his regional audience groups. Among these audience groups at the international film festivals, his films are always acknowledged for having a distinctive style.

Chang returned to Taiwan after touring Hong Kong, South Korea, and Japan with his award-winning films during the first decade of his film career. In addition, local film festivals began to boom in Taiwan. This boom attracted many interested audiences that had been exposed to visual media in the age of advanced technology, but whose film literacy had yet to be cultivated. His family background and working experience influenced him to believe that the gap between elite film festival audiences and the ordinary viewing public can be closed. This belief comes from his personal experience. It took time for him to master a filmic language before he developed his own style. He believed that film audiences, in the same way, needed time and experience to acquire film literacy before they understand how to appreciate a film. Thus, as I will demonstrate in the chapters below, he trusts a non-elite yet interested audience to appreciate sophisticated film techniques that are solidly embedded in cinematic narratives. Interested yet inexperienced audiences simply need guidance to be able to appreciate quality films or to even enjoy visual challenges that obscure films throw at them. International film festivals in East Asia and the boom of local film festivals provide him with a perfect platform to begin this cultivation.

Chang grew up watching well-received Mandarin films in theater, many of which were deeply conventional.<sup>38</sup> His apprenticeship with director Yu and Tsui helped him to become familiar with various mainstream shooting and editing styles. Directors of mainstream cinema, for instance, often employ sequences composed on the pattern of shot, reverse shot, close up, head shot, and intensive continuity editing to make a plot-driven story.

The story in such films is told conventionally. It often begins with distinguishing the protagonist from other characters before it moves forward with the development of the protagonist's characteristics. Western feminist critics' analyses of classical Hollywood movies disclose how mainstream cinema uses these techniques to engage its audience in the story.<sup>39</sup> This disclosure of establishing a viewing position is particularly critical in such films, as it bridges the spectator's gaze with the protagonist's point of view. If a location is introduced in an establishing shot, this cinema will then link it explicitly to the protagonist's point of view, usually through tracking shots, changes of focus from far to near, headshots, or other point of view shots that lead the spectators' eyes into the protagonist's work and his angle on it. Once the audience learns to identify with the protagonist through such camera work, the distance between the audience and the protagonist is diminished. The friction between viewers and the subjects in the movie is central to the study of film reception, as Judith Mayne outlines in her book.<sup>40</sup> It also

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<sup>38</sup> Lin Hsin-Jo, "dang fudao ban heilian," *Lianhebao* (6 November 2006) <http://reader.roodo.com/twmovie/archives/2427369.html> (accessed 28 May 2015).

<sup>39</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Pandora's Box: Topographies of Curiosity," *Fetishism and Curiosity* (London: BFI, 1996): 53-64.

<sup>40</sup> Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1-12.

leads to an ethical issue that André Bazin has revealed in his evaluation of continuity editing: how viewers see *differently* from that character.<sup>41</sup>

Chang certainly recognizes that these shooting techniques are also commonly used in award-winning films. These standard shooting techniques help establish the audience's viewing position and pull them into line with the protagonist's point of view. However, this strategy of drawing audiences into a story requires much artifice, which is against Chang's filmmaking ethic. When he began to participate in filmmaking, he transitioned from seeing his work from the perspective of an audience member to planning it like a filmmaker. This transition initially caused him to constantly question how the audience can become so fascinated in watching a film when they know that the film lies. His working experience with director Hou and his continuous interest in filmmaking drove him to adhere to the position of the *auteur* filmmaker who has an individual voice. Chang was confronted by and accepted this filmmaking ethic. A filmmaker is not merely an illusionist who can create a world on screen that is true to life. He is also a smuggler who can use the camera to invent a new filmic language to transcend inherited aesthetic conventions and to challenge the spectator's perception of cinema. Chang's filmmaking ethic and his insistence on using filmmaking as a tool to continue exploring filmic language earn him admissions to film festivals.

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<sup>41</sup> André Bazin, *What is Cinema* Vol.1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 10.

## **Chang Tso-Chi and His Films**

Chang Tso-Chi is not a prolific director; he made only eight feature films during the first twenty years of his film career (aside from other media productions for TV, which do not come into play in my discussions). Still, he uses films to develop what has emerged as a unique cinema that documents Taiwan through his observations about social changes. Interestingly, these social changes, punctuated by drastic socio-economic reforms and driven by the globalization of capitalism, have not led a newly freed nation to prosperity, as many would have assumed might have happened. As Chang sees it, Taiwan's new prosperity actually results in limitations that restrict mobility for those from the margins of society. His consistent focus on people who have been forced into the margins of society by global capital presents an exceptional critique from a socialist perspective that is noteworthy when global capitalism has transformed post-martial law Taiwan into a capitalist society. The dominant value of markets, profits, and returns on investment has been expanding, threatening Chang's filmmaking philosophy, as he sees filmmaking to be a means for continuing social critique rather than accumulating profit.

Chang's films always feature young adults as protagonists. This focus on young adults reflects Chang's careful plan for films to be released in theater circuits. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Chang faces the greater challenge of appealing to audience groups from all walks of life. An ongoing trend is that the ages of audience groups that regularly visit theater circuits or become interested in film festivals has become younger. This younger audience generation—an interested yet uneducated audience—becomes the target for Chang to reach. By presenting his films to this

audience, Chang expects them to become familiar with a range of filmic language, even those that treat audiences as passive receivers in an age of mass-production films. In fact, the filmic language of mass-market films has been carefully constructed within a set of conventions that have remained familiar since continuity editing was explored during the silent era. Featuring young adults in his films becomes a perfect ruse for Chang: these characters will attract attention from this younger generation of audiences, who easily adapt to seeing things through the protagonists' eyes and thus learn new viewing habits through their identification with the young actors' point of view. The viewing habits that they develop foster empathy, often leaving these audiences with a deep impression about underprivileged families intertwined with the underworld that Chang depicts.

Young adults represented in Chang's films are usually city dwellers from the margins of society. The gap between the urban and the rural, which used to be the focus of the NTC, has shifted to the cityscape in Chang's films. Chang uses these protagonists, their families, neighborhoods, living circumstances, and unexpected encounters to show a façade of a modern capitalist city that conceals difficult issues. Chang does not offer strong critiques of this city façade to urge his audience to make some changes to the current situation. Neither does he offer a solution to show his audience how a man's determination can beat bad fortune. Chang meticulously uses film stock to capture images and put them together to give audiences a glimpse of these issues. By the end, his films always leave his audience with these unresolvable issues.

The hardship of life does impel these young city dwellers to make efforts to change their current situation. They often grow up with difficult family issues that make

them eager to join the real world as an adult earlier rather than later. They imagine becoming part of the dominant social class to pursue love, wealth, or anything that they are made to believe would lead to a better life. In these films, these young protagonists always embark on a journey to explore the world outside of their families. They hope that their journey will lead them to a bright future.

In Chang's portrayals of these coming-of-age rites, the most troubling aspect for his audience is that the protagonists are fated to experience hardship early in life. This sense of fate partly results from Chang's obsession with depicting the underworld in his films. The underworld encapsulates a façade of the real world and offers opportunities for the protagonists to escape their current situation and to move closer to their imagined life. However, these opportunities come with a price that they may not be willing to pay. The price presented in the form of bullies, violence, and death reminds these young adults of their comparably difficult family issues. Sometimes, unexpected tragedies also befall their beloved family members. Thus, their journey often ends with a return to their dysfunctional families, who somehow maintain a haven for them to take shelter.

This sense of being doomed also comes from the protagonists' restricted social mobility. Taiwan's economic development in the early stages facilitated social mobility between urban and rural populations, but this mobility was highly uneven. A large population of young adults moved from rural areas to urban cities for opportunities to succeed. Many of them settled down in cities and raised children in a living space from which they were alienated. Their past living space, which comprised a strong supporting community, cultivated personalities that enabled them to survive in the urban, alienating

space. Their grown-up experiences, values, and survival methods in an urban city were no longer applicable for their offspring. This sense of alienation thus became a shared experience among the first generation of young adults who grew up in an urban space. Although they enjoyed the convenience, access to information, and social activities that come with living in a city, their restricted social mobility and desire to lead an ideal life are dilemmas that they face.

Chang's films have always presented different stories with similar plots, given his early focus on young protagonists. These stories impress the audience with Chang's consistent cinematography developed over the years. Chang likes to employ amateur actors. Before he begins shooting, he insists on his actors spending a certain amount of time living together in order to become familiar with each other. He intentionally uses shots of longer-than-normal duration with deep focus to capture his actors' performances without consciously paying attention to the presence of his camera. This practice fascinates his audiences because of the strong sense of realism his use of the camera conveys.

Realism has been a significant aesthetic convention in world film history. In the context of Taiwan's film history, it has been a dominant trend since the 1960s. Among film critics, Chang's cinematography has been considered direct heirs to the realism of Hou Hsiao-Hsien. It is not a coincidence for them to share the urge to sustain this aesthetic convention by weaving in local cultural components to document Taiwan in constant transition. Chang has continued exploring this style of realism and transforms this conventional realism into one that carries his stylistic signature.

## **Conclusion**

Chang Tso-Chi's story is not based on a rosy situation. He has devoted himself almost exclusively to filmmaking over the past two decades. His contribution to Taiwan's film history is his ability to work his way up to a film director and to independently sustain his filmmaking. His case thus offers unique materials for scholars as the latest chapter in the development of the Taiwan New Cinema in the 1990s and 2000s. The following chapters will now turn to a more in-depth study of Chang Tso-Chi's cinema, and I believe it is a timely contribution allowing us to reexamine how the development of Taiwan's film culture and history has not only sustained the legacy passed down by directors of the Taiwan New Cinema, but also moved beyond it. This study of Chang will present an example of how a new generation NTC filmmakers sustain filmmaking in a new epoch and continue to find a distinctive voice that appeals to both domestic and international markets. That discussion will set up the subsequent chapters of this study.

Chapter one offers a textual analysis of Chang's films with a focus on how he uses a solid black screen. By examining the use of solid black screen with other continuity editing techniques, I argue that Chang uses his films to restore a set of cinematic traditions before he shows his audiences at film festivals how he works to break away from them. A solid black screen was commonly seen in western silent movies when filmmakers were exploring continuity editing techniques to make narratives. It has a functional usage—dividing a narrative into a beginning, a body, and a closure. As motion pictures became prevalent and viewers internalized this narrative logic, its usage

was greatly reduced in order to avoid any visual fractures. Chang adopts this seemingly old-school editing technique to uncover a sense of film whose language is not self-evident, but rather is constructed through a set of traditions.

Chapter two looks at realism, a commonly assumed cinematic practice in New Taiwanese Cinema. By contextualizing this realism in Taiwan's film history, I argue that Chang not only carries on a cinematic practice that the first generation NTC directors established but also works magic with it to deceive audience's perception of *reality*. His magic for deceiving audience's perception is noteworthy because it is able to garner the local audiences' attention in order to attain lukewarm box office success and to receive intra-regional reception through international film festivals in the region. This reception suggests a new group of film audience is emerging. Audiences' reception of the NTC crosses national boundaries within the region and calls for an imagination of community that comprises both East Asia as well as those who share similar concerns about their societies.

Chapter three deals with the issue of identity, a heatedly debated topic in Taiwan's public sphere since the 1990s. I argue that the narrative space Chang creates in his films should not be reduced to a commercial scheme. Instead, it should be examined in the context of post-martial law, Taiwan, where various social movements compete to reform society into a new order. During this competition, the making of Taiwanese identity, a subjective issue, stands out to win critical mass support in society. The making of this identity often appears with discussions about gender issues, nation-building, and social reforms in the public sphere. Using *Soul of a Demon* as an example to assess this

making, I argue that various discussions about this identity construction actually invites audiences to speculate the path that s/he would take to continue this formation if it would differ from that the protagonist had taken.

Finally, a brief conclusion will turn back to the NTC and what its continuation implies. I will look into the relationship between the NTC and the recent boom of Taiwanese film production. This examination will shed light on reconsidering how to define this new cinema in its original, regional, and trans-regional contexts.

## Chapter One

### *Ah Chung (1996) and Darkness and Light (1999):*

#### From Cuts to Fades into Black

##### Introduction

As Karel Reisz and Gavin Millar have surveyed in their book, film continuity shows a filmmaker's conscious control of the material being shot.<sup>1</sup> This continuity relies on film editing techniques that are introduced on the screen for practical reasons. "Cut to black" or "fade to black" is a film editing technique that ruptures continuity within a shot or connections between two shots. While cut to black demonstrates a cut that jumps from the screen picture to a completely black screen, fade to black shows a less abrupt cut that gradually reduces the brightness of the screen picture until the entire screen is flat black. This film editing technique first appeared in the silent movie era (1895-1929) when filmmakers were experimenting with and discovering the most effective ways to construct meaningful narratives, including what to put in and what to leave out of the film, the order of film imagery, the frame of each shot, etc.<sup>2</sup>

The use of cut or fade to black is an understudied formal aspect of film. During the early period of film theory, montage was heavily theorized. Montage pieces together

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<sup>1</sup> Karel Reisz, *The Technique of Film Editing* (London and New York: Focal Press, 2009), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Don Fairservice, *Film Editing: History, theory and Practice* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), 1.

a series of short shots, often to condense time and space, or to connect certain information. Today, it remains one of the best-known forms of continuity editing between two or three individual shots, and it is understood as effective because of the idea that film audiences will attempt to establish a meaningful relationship among any two or three pieces of film imagery that are joined together. However, this emphasis on the audience's capability to make sense of film imagery may not be the only way to discuss such editing, given that the audience has a horizon of expectation cultivated from their viewing experiences. Montage's act of "making sense" may not be familiar to all audiences.

The traditional use of cut to black or fade to black has a number of emblematic functions that underlie the contemporary audience's reception. Films may use those cuts to signal the opening and ending of the film, the beginning or end of a scene, amplification of a thrilling effect projected by the following shot, the passage of time, and so on. Unlike other visible shots that anchor film narratives, cut to black or fade to black usually only takes a few seconds each time, and thus it is easy to ignore in analyzing film editing. This may also explain why cut to black or fade to black can remain a substantial practice in film editing, just as discussions about its varied diegetic meanings are scarce and restricted to the practical or emblematic functions that it has accrued throughout film history.

Although Chang Tso-Chi credited different editors for their film editing in his first few productions, it is commonly known within Taiwan's film industry that Chang himself, as a film director, oversees his film production and maintains close control over the final cut of his film production. In an interview with Cheng Ping-Hung, a Taiwanese

film critic, Chang candidly admits that film editors with whom he had worked all disapproved of his cuts and fades to a solid black screen that he used in order to reduce interruption to the continuity of the film narrative, yet he always upholds this usage.<sup>3</sup> Chang Tso-Chi employs this film editing technique and sustains this practice in his films as his hallmark, and his team follows his lead. In fact, this massive use of the cut or fade to black in his films has made the solid black screen Chang's signature among his contemporary filmmakers. I contend here that Chang has taken up cut to black to influence the way his audiences learn to "read" his filmmaking and that he is pitching his films to a contemporary young audience whose viewing experience has been cultivated by mainstream cinema. Audiences who try to make sense of his films will hardly succeed without being able to read what Chang's hallmark editing fingerprint is meant to do, as he cuts to black or fades to black between shots, creating a very specific kind of montage intended to influence his audience's interpretation of the films.

In this chapter, I will begin my inquiry into Chang's *Ah Chung* (1996) and *Darkness and Light* (1999). These two feature films were produced three years apart and clearly document how Chang has achieved a milestone in his filmmaking career in his ability to engage in new kinds of conversations with his audience. I maintain that Chang's use of the cut to black can serve as a new key to situating his films in the context of the New Taiwanese Cinema (NTC thereafter). As we shall see, his use of these film techniques shows his attention to how audiences receive the development of the NTC in the 1990s and 2000s.

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<sup>3</sup> Cheng Ping-Hung, "Zouchu changlang: fang Chang Tso-Chi," 189.

I will thus show how Chang Tso-Chi uses the cut or fade to black to create different kinds of montages and hence to invite his audience to understand film narrative, to distinguish plot from story, and to be able to watch non-plot driven films. This invitation comes from a social responsibility that Chang imposes on himself as a filmmaker. Through his films, he tries to converse with his audience about what it means to watch film, starting with insisting that his audience become very much aware of the fact that film representations are not real. In this sense, his audiences in the commercial theaters will be fascinated in new ways: Is it possible that there is more to watching film than fulfilling the need to be entertained through intuitive contact with the film? Each film shows Chang using the fade or cut to black in new ways, with audiences thus having to start reading the film in a different way.

Up to now, critics have not necessarily followed this continuity editing technique. They point out his uses of cut to black or fade to black in their writings, but these discussions about his uses of cut or fade to black are usually not the focus of these articles.<sup>4</sup> Their discussions offer functional interpretations, such as disrupting the film narrative or leaving a blank in the film narrative for a transition. In her article, Chen Hsiao-Yun does attempt to push these descriptive observations further to develop an aesthetic meaning of the solid black screen from the perspective of eliding time and space sensibly, but she fails to consider this eliding time and space in the film as a whole. I will offer a systematic reading of Chang's use of the continuity editing technique to make

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<sup>4</sup> Liao Gene-Fon, "Chang Tso-chi de dujia mifang: guangming xieshi," 117. Chen Hsiao-Yun, "'Taiwan Xindianying De Yuyun Yu Houxindianying De Guodu: Cong Chang Tso-Chi Dianyingzhong De Xushi Meixue Tanqi,'" 160.

sense of his employment of the solid black screen in his films, paying particular attention to how it is employed in the opening, the main sequences, and the ending of the film. By focusing on the alternations between cut to black or fade to black and the shots that come before and after the black screen, I will take up Chang's challenge to understand how this editing technique is capable of strengthening or weakening the rhythm of film narrative. I contend that this challenge is an invitation to respond to or to resist this rhythm and to develop the agency by which audiences are able to make sense of the film.

In one sense, Chang has picked up an editing technique that might seem old-fashioned when he uses the cut or fade to black in his films. Among a handful of the recovered silent films available today, *The Italian* (1915) demonstrates the classical use of fade to black in film. After the opening credits, the film begins with an opening sequence showing a curtain opening and ends with a curtain closing, followed by a fade to black. This use of curtains is common in stage performance, and scriptwriters can use “fade to black” analogously to playwrights noting a blackout to end a scene. In his book, Don Fairservice documents and interprets the film editing techniques from silent films. He underlines this particular device of introducing a prologue and epilogue into the film narrative among its contemporary episodic shorts, which emphasizes the showing of an event.<sup>5</sup> *The Italian* demonstrates why the term “fade to black” now denotes a traditional way to end a film.

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<sup>5</sup> Don Fairservice, *Film Editing: History, theory and Practice* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), 149-150.

In addition to marking the beginning or the ending of a film, cut to black often appeared in early films along with dialogue inter-titles inserted within a shot. *Metropolis* (1927) shows the lips of the speaker beginning to move, then cuts to black with inter-titles, and finally returns to the shot of the actor speaking as he or she completes the line. This insertion with inter-titles had to remain on the screen long enough for audiences to read, but also had to stay succinct to minimize the essential disruption a hold in a cutting rhythm inevitably produces. Therefore, the cut to black in this usage was kept short and often omitted, if the content of a spoken line could be inferred from its context.

As it became possible to record sound on film and many of the film editing techniques came to be formalized in the following decades, the use of cut to black or fade to black decreases drastically, if not completely disappears, because scene ends and other moments in film narrative that had been marked by cut to black now had different markers available. *Citizen Kane* (1941) is an exception, as it continues to show the incorporation of fade to black or cut to black to produce an efficient narrative. This may be part of the reason why *Citizen Kane* is considered a classic film even today, as it incorporates a wide variety of the film editing techniques established up to date, including cut to black and fade to black, to present a compelling story about Charles Kane.

*Rear Window* (1954) also employs fade to black and fade out of black several times, most often to indicate the transition of time between a preceding shot and a following one showing the protagonist stays in his room. The narrative moves forward, fading to black and then fading out into the next shot without dwelling on explaining

what happens during the passing time. *The Shining* (1980) utilizes cut to black with inter-titles to indicate the passing days, weeks, and months. But Kubrick uses it very consistently, with each following shot showing how characters repeat the same routine in the hotel throughout the film. In this way, his use of cut to black not only creates a sense of déjà vu, but also intensifies the thrilling effect this edit can create.

From cutting to black within a shot or between shots to fading to black and fading out of black, Chang Tso-Chi's films depend on the interplays of these editing techniques used by these world directors. His practice of cut to black or fade to black does not break away from the established film editing techniques that use cut or fade to black to move forward the film narrative. He certainly is also not the first filmmaker of Chinese-language cinemas (huayu dianying) to use it in filmmaking. In the reception of award-winning Chinese-language films during the 1990s, cut to black or fade to black is also commonly seen, as *A City of Sadness* (1989), *Farewell My Concubine* (1993), and *To Live* (1994) demonstrate.

### **A Solid Black Screen**

Nonetheless, when we put this film technique into the context of Chang's audiences, something more important emerges about his conscious (over)use of this specific editing technique. The premier of Chang's first two films took place at the Busan International Film Festival (Seoul, South Korea) and the Tokyo International Film Festival (Tokyo, Japan) before he brought these films back to Taiwan for the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival (Taipei, Taiwan). After these premiers, his films were

distributed in the local commercial theaters, a dominant distribution pattern for Taiwan's film market after film festivals. When the film receives popular responses from the local audiences, it is able to stay longer on the commercial theater screen to continue garnering audiences' attention.<sup>6</sup> This screening practice also necessarily draws our attention to Chang's audience groups, as the audiences shift from those who attend film festivals to moviegoers in commercial theaters. During the time period when many of Chang's peers in Taiwan left film production for television commercials or programs, Chang had been pressured to increase his audience group by making sure his films can make this transition from film festivals to commercial theaters. In other words, he had to make a film that not only was good enough to premier at film festivals, but was also accessible enough for regular moviegoers in commercial theaters. As a result, Chang could not simply decide on an *auteur* approach to editing, but rather had to take into consideration a generation of Taiwanese young adults who grew up watching plot-driven commercial films. Young adults have become the regular moviegoers that sustain their local film markets in Taiwan as well as countries that do not have a robust film industry today.

Chang indeed considered his editing options in this light. In his interview with Cheng, Chang discloses that his use of massive cut to black and fade to black is intentional, though the film editors who work with him disapprove of such employment.<sup>7</sup> Chang agrees with the critic's observation and offers a simple interpretation of seeing cut to black or fade to black as a special effect that creates a sense of animation. But he

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<sup>6</sup> "Heian zhi guang," *KingMedia*, n.d. <http://movie.kingmedia.com.tw/channelk/dl/> (accessed on 30 May 2015). t4, "Kuanghe meili shiguang damai shangying riqi yanchang," ptt.cc, Web. 24 September 2002, <http://webptt.com/m.aspx?n=bbs/Ourmovies/M.1032802216.A.4E5.html> (accessed on 30 May 2015)

<sup>7</sup> Cheng Ping-Hung, "Zouchu changlang: fang Chang Tso-Chi," 189.

disagrees with the critic's traditional interpretations of a cut or a fade to black as the grammar in his films. He points out that he uses the cut visually, not to bridge time or space through it. The major reason why he insists on using cut to black or fade to black in his films is because he is attempting to establish a compare-and-contrast between lightness (shots) and darkness (a solid black screen). To conclude this interview, he insists cut to black or fade to black cannot be isolated from the film as a stock piece of "film grammar." Instead, it has to be understood in relation to each film in order for the audience (including critics) to make the best sense of it.

In other words, he insists that each film has to be understood as a complete whole in order to better understand the effects of his use of cut to black and fade to black in his film. Chang's responses to the film critic's questions thus suggest that film directors and critics may understand a film from two different positions, but that does not mean that they necessarily contradict each other. Chang's responses highlight the critical point of taking each film into consideration when developing the meaning of a solid black screen. For him, it is more than a stock film cut; it can be an active tool to construct meaning in the narrative cinema.

### ***Ah Chung: Uncovering Sense in Visual Style***<sup>8</sup>

In his first publicly released feature film in Taiwan, Chang Tso-Chi began to use cut to black to attract his audience's attention. This attention to how a film would be read

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<sup>8</sup> Because of copyright issues, Chang's *Midnight Revenge* was never publicly released or screened in Taiwan. Once I obtain access to the director's cut version of this film, I will include it in this chapter to make my analysis of Chang's films in the early stages more thorough in the future.

in a screening is probably an old habit for sophisticated audiences, particularly those who regularly attended film festivals or who had watched a broad variety of canonical films. However, Chang's film calls for the audience's attention to the screen in different ways, when he disrupts the connections between visual shots with cuts to black. He uses this technique very overtly, targeting the images on the screen to attract attention from a generation of young adults who are used to watching films while eating popcorn, drinking soda, texting, and socializing with friends.

*Ah Chung* opens with a solid black screen and a crisp beating sound. This opening sequence almost immediately cuts to black in six seconds and continues to be disrupted by ten cut to blacks in the next sixty seconds. Opening with sound on a black screen is an old trick from the days of blockbuster Hollywood epics like *Lawrence of Arabia*, which were released as theatrical events and ticketed like plays, not films. Many of them had overtures (like Broadway musicals do) which served to attract the attention of film audiences, telling audiences that the screening had begun, and offering them a few seconds to imagine possible scenes that match the sound in order to set the mood of the film before the actual visuals start. Whether the audience becomes curious about the sound or simply blanks out the outside world mentally, opening a film with sound on the black screen prepares the audience to be aware that the film screening has begun. An opening sound- or music-track as a friendly reminder may be redundant for sophisticated audiences, but it is very refreshing for today's inexperienced audiences who have not been exposed to the idea in decades.

The use of cut to a solid black screen appears not only in *Ah Chung*'s opening, but also throughout the film. This consistent use of cut to black or fade to black indicates that a solid black screen is a solid element in the film narrative, and the frequency of its appearance also sets the rhythm for this film. In this case, the opening supports the narrative's establishment of the main character.

*Ah Chung* is a story about Ah Chung, a high school graduate who is put in the local community to practice the Eight Infernal Generals (bajiajiang) parade for his mother's sake as he waits for the military draft. As Yang Chia Chieh captures in his photograph that is selected for the annual National Geographical Photo Contest in Washington, D.C., this Eight Infernal Generals ritual practice requires a communal parade and discloses Taiwan's communal cultural practice. Instead of introducing to the audience several key characters related to the protagonist, the opening brings to the screen central elements of Ah Chung's life, including how he spends most of his time, his practice of a ritual dance, and landscape shots that do not necessarily cohere with the images of dance. These locales are punctuated with six cuts to black. The rhythmic beat in the sound over the black screen emerges and correlates with Ah Chung's dance steps, and his voiceover helps establish Ah Chung as an upright and outspoken protagonist who is quite literally moving to his own beat and is not necessarily embedded with that of society.

Listening to the sound of a metronome on a solid black screen in later scenes in the opening, the audience's attention is drawn to identifying where the sound comes from when the first scene appears on the screen. Two teenagers with painted faces are

practicing dance steps under the eaves of a structure topped by a blue- and white-striped canvas awning. Their peers are sitting around the dancers to observe their practice. In 30 seconds or so, cut to black ends this first shot of people, other than the domestic interior presumed to be the protagonist's house.

What follows is a seemingly random shot because it jumps to an open space close to the ocean where the sun is setting down in the background and a teenage boy, not clearly identified as belonging to either of the earlier settings, is squatting in the front with both of his arms raised in the air. Shortly after, an adult walks into the scene, scolds this boy for his lousy practice, and leaves him alone on the scene again. As the camera slowly closes in on the teenage boy, a film score comes to the scene and a cut to black soon appears with the inter-titles “*Ah Chung*” on the screen. Now, the audience realizes that the squatting teenager is probably the protagonist, as the next few shots show him to the audience in different contexts. They see Ah Chung riding his scooter to pick up his grandfather after his practice. On their way home, a 40-second long shot not only captures the close interaction between a grandson and his grandfather, but also lightens the audience’s mood with their humorous conversation.

With its mixture of shots, cut to black, and landscape shots, *Ah Chung*’s opening seems disjunctive. They do not have clear connections between them, and the abrupt cut to black reinforces a sense of disconnect. This is not a montage that will “add up” as a context for what comes later, but rather, it is the establishment of clear signposts that the audience will have to follow through the film in order to make sense of them to the end. The landscape shots pan from an urban city to a wetland reservation in the suburb, from

far to close, from a bird's-eye view to an eye-level perspective. Step by step, these shots bring the audience out of city to where Ah Chung's story takes place. Ah Chung's sonorous voiceover accompanying that series of landscape shots also guides the audience to start to piece together these fragmented shots. The camera actually travels across the landscape, moves from an urban space to a wildlife preserve, and eventually stops at the front door of Ah Chung's house. There, the camera includes a doorframe in the shot to put the audience consciously behind the frame so that they see his interaction with his family members from outside of the front door.

These opening shots do not offer the audience a simple identification with the protagonist, nor do they establish him as a *voyeur* hiding safely behind a camera, as mainstream cinema tends to do. Instead, their cinematography leaves the audience with the need to construct their own possible expectations, rather than guiding them into a probable interpretation of what will come. Chang uses mostly medium shots, which offer the audience a third person point of view in observing Ah Chung's story rather than moving in to tell them who he is. They only know a few activities that he does. These activities and their locales do not necessarily cohere to meet the mainstream expectation of a decent lifestyle. This third person point of view that circumscribes and locates the characters and the protagonist, rather than defining them in a rigid relation, also distinguishes *Ah Chung* from other domestic films released around the same time. What this opening montage does, with its cut-to-black continuity, is provide the audiences with *the pieces* of experiences that they will need to confront in order to piece together what the story means for them.

This does not mean that Chang abandons shot reverse shot, closing up, or headshot to allow his audience to identify with Ah Chung. Since *Ah Chung* is not a plot-driven story and Ah Chung is not a professional actor, Chang knows that he has to use these shots at the right times in order for the audience to identify with the protagonist and to create climaxes.



Figure 1: Montage of three shots before the film opening ends.

As Figure 1 shows, the 40-second long shot of Ah Chung riding with his grandfather captures a relaxing moment for the audience, a possible point of identification for what surely will be a heart-warming film. But then, the cut to black breaks this illusion by pushing the audience out of the film world. Facing the solid black screen, the audience's consciousness returns to their seats in the theater, and they become aware of their viewing positions in the third-person point of view. They are not *in* the story. They are looking in at it. The next shot overlooks the busy city from a high ground with Ah Chung's voiceover, and it shifts how the audience interacts with Ah Chung on the screen. Conventional filmmaking would render it unlikely for Ah Chung to suddenly appear on this high ground and to speak to the audience directly after the audience had seen him with his grandfather. The filmic syntax in the two scenes is simply different. Thus, the shots appearing before and after cut to black might easily confuse the audience

or make them less comfortable with “what must come next,” especially because the shots that come after cut to black are a series of landscape shots from a distance and are not labeled clearly in relation to the protagonist. The audience cannot help but have these questions in mind: Is this landscape what Ah Chung is looking at? Or where is he going? Or where he is? These landscape shots bring the audience to travel from a city to a wetland preserve, and so they are legible in conventional terms. The montage of landscape shots sets up the character's point of destination, and the audience eventually sees it on the screen.



Figure 2: Montage of four landscape shots establishing the locality of Ah Chung’s story.

However, a series of landscape shots, shown in Figure 2, further reinforce the audience’s viewing position as that of a third person in a theater because the audience does not move *into the film* with the character. The audience is forced to confront new information and establish the context themselves. The only connection between the shots before and after cut to black is that Ah Chung’s conversation with his grandfather becomes his voiceover, accompanying empty shots. Hearing that voiceover, the audience laughs when Ah Chung reveals his inner feelings about his new name being homophonic with impotence. But only part of that voiceover—his innocent comment on why unlucky

things continue to happen to unlucky people—points audience to the central organizing fact of the film: *Ah Chung* is a fictional story, but it occurs in a real place, which has recently become a designated reservation for wildlife in the vicinity of Taipei city.

The verbal disclosure of how a fictional story takes place in a real location may simply be read as a narrative technique that reinforces the credibility of this film. It can also be considered a way to expose the audience to social issues pertaining to inhabitants who continue to reside on a location that is at first unnamed, but then acquires an “official role” as a nature sanctuary. The “rural” setting where Ah Chung and his family live is anything but natural: in such a nature preserve, any road constructions or the setup of streetlights would take forever to be done, if they were even allowed. Nonetheless, their poverty is real: Ah Chung’s mother does comedy performances on an outdoor stage for wedding banquets but is barely able to make enough to support the family. She is unable to leave the preserve for employment because she needs to take care of Ah Chung’s grandfather and intellectually disabled younger brother. Gradually, the audience finds out that Ah Chung grew up in a family with parents who have been separated since his father raped his stepsister while drunk. Such details are revealed gradually, as *Ah Chung* continues to make this story less about Ah Chung, but more about each of his family members. *Ah Chung* shows how this family continues to survive in such hard conditions when each of them is tangled up with various real-life issues.

Cut to black can cause the audience to experience a real visual disturbance on the screen. It can also create a kind of spatial suspension where the audience is given the freedom to make sense of the film on its own. However, this spatial freedom that cut to

black offers does not come without restrictions. It is given at least a direction, constituted by the shots prior to and following the black screen. In addition to introducing the protagonist to the audience, *Ah Chung*'s opening sequence manages to reverse the hierarchy of the important elements of the story, highlighting the location where Ah Chung is raised rather than the personal stories of the protagonist and his family alone, which are projected according to contexts.

Cuts to black, appearing every twenty seconds in the first few minutes and every thirty to forty seconds in the next two minutes of the film, create the anchor point for the film narrative and pose the question to the audience of how Ah Chung's activities and the places he inhabits inform his story. To be sure, there is a seductive, almost touristic dimension to what is shown: Ah Chung's surroundings appear as lively images of Guandu Nature Park in Taipei city and bring audience to identify with Ah Chung and his story through the emphasis on locality rather than personality. This juxtaposition between the surroundings of Ah Chung's story—a real place—and the introduction of Ah Chung—a fictional protagonist—is established, I believe, in another way through Chang's uses of distance shots. A close-up would highlight Ah Chung and essentially efface the nature park. Chang's use of cut to black actually *does* establish the greater framework for the story and allows Ah Chung's story to be more original than standard films.

### ***Ah Chung: From the Climax to No Simple Resolution through Cut to Black***

Even an audience well versed in film technique needs guidance to acquire the skill of making sense of film on its own. How to guide interested audiences through the film to turn visual disturbances into a tool or agent helping it to comprehend the film on its own terms becomes a challenge. As the film narrative develops and as each shot begins to stay longer on the screen, the frequency of cutting to black decreases in *Ah Chung*, and the audience gets the idea that the film is moving away from the establishing shots and into the film's main body. During the film's main part, the appearance of a solid black screen often becomes more conventional, as it marks a transition of time or a transition from one scene to another. Yet, Chang has established a familiar rhythm in the opening sequence for these transitions of cuts to black and continues to conform to that rhythm. Challenges remain for the audience to stay focused on the screen when facing an abrupt cut to black before cutting into the next shot. The screen time of each cut to black in this film is two to three seconds on average, and it sometimes can be extended to five seconds or longer depending on the need. How to guide the audience through this sense of disruption is a challenge Chang faces.

Throughout *Ah Chung*, Chang repeats the structuring principles he established in the film's opening. The potentially disorienting disconnection between shots showed in *Ah Chung* is stitched together by means of some kind of soundscape or foley, including sound continued over from the previous shot, a voiceover, the film score, or an early blending in of the sound from the following shot. The uses of sounds to help enhance the sense of continuity in film images have been explored in *Sound Theory/Sound Practice* (1992) and *Audio-vision* (1994), which makes the audience aware of how the use of

sound also establishes a sense of film. I will only touch on issues concerning audio-vision practices in this dissertation, but the topic will be a focus of my future research. This awareness of sound in film is crucial here for us to understand the development of *Ah Chung's* narrative. When it seems possible that the audience might have difficulty understanding how the disjunctive visuals might go together, Chang's sound bridge always appears in a timely fashion to calm their nerves. The sound offers the audience a clue as to the development of the story and reduces the sense of disconnect between shots.

Few exceptions to this stylistic rule occur in the three scenes that constitute the story's climax. When Ah Chung finds his sister's partner, Ah Ming, who is running away from a gang, he witnesses how Ah Ming is hacked to death. Before the audience enters this scene, a cut to black accompanied by a music track of the film score creates a sense of mystery and gradually leads the audience to the scene where the incident is about to occur. With the rhythm of the film score, a cut to shot leads the audience to see how Ah Chung makes a trip to locate Ah Ming. He takes the bus to a mountain area, stops in a small community, and asks the locals for directions to Ah Ming's location; the locals then offer him a ride on the motorcycle to go further into the mountains. After the arduous trudge, Ah Chung finds Ah Ming fishing at the feet of the valley. The score fades out of the scene as Ah Chung goes down to the valley to deliver the money to Ah Ming. A group of youngsters, who have followed Ah Chung since his departure for this trip, quietly approaches them from behind. As Ah Chung and Ah Ming are talking, they use

machetes to hack Ah Ming to pieces and kick Ah Chung into the water without any hesitation.



Figure 3: Montage of four shots capturing the murder scene in *Ah Chung*.

At this moment, Chang uses a pattern of shot and reverse shot to enhance the scene's dramatic tension. For 30 seconds, his camera switches between two point of view shots, above and below water, as the images in Figure 3 show. These two shots are subjective shots that contrast an omniscient point of view with an eye-line shot to emulate Ah Chung's point of view. The subjective shot brings us into the water to see him thrashing. The eye-line shot shows us the scene from Ah Chung's position when he comes up to the surface and takes a breath. He sees the young thugs brutally attack Ah Ming. Over 30 seconds, the shots shift between the omniscient point of view and Ah Chung's point of view, and the audience's emotion is aroused. A cut to black cuts off the audience's gaze and stops the audience's emotional participation in the violent scene.

This cut to black lasts for five seconds on the screen, followed by a twenty-five second long, uninterrupted shot. This longer time span shot pans up and down on the water's surface, as if to emulate Ah Chung's point of view. He is thrashing around, trying to reach Ah Ming, who lies bathed in blood on the shore. The camera's slow pan encourages the audience's emotions to level out, but then a jump cut shows Ah Chung

carrying Ah Ming on his back, running on the mountain road shouting. A cut to black again signals the filmmaker's next attempt to block the audience's empathy for Ah Chung's fear or for Ah Ming's injury.

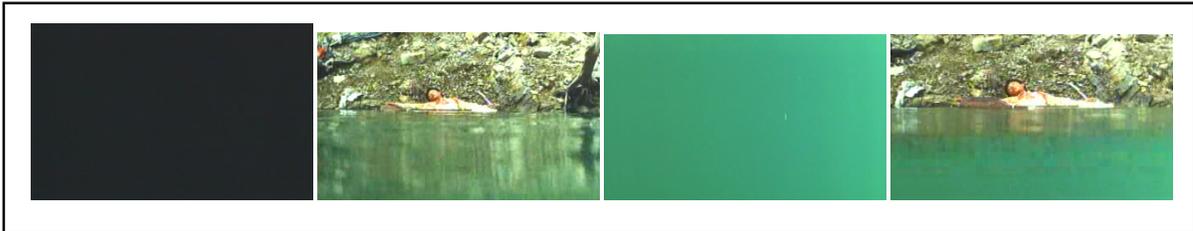


Figure 4: Montage of shots capturing the crime scene after the murder is committed.

Disjuncture is again the result. What follows the cut to black is Ah Chung sitting numbly in a police station with dried blood all over his shirt and pants. Ah Chung's father comes to the police station and takes him home, because he is still a minor. On their way home, Father scolds Ah Chung, as he usually does without trying to understand what Ah Chung has experienced. The shock and fear that Ah Chung has just experienced turns into anger when his father kicks him to the ground. At this moment, Ah Chung confronts his dad for the first time about raping his own daughter and questions his continued indulgence in alcohol after what he has done to his daughter. Ah Chung is so angry that he even crushes glass bottles on his head to show his father that he is no longer the little boy who used to fear his fists and kicks.

The next sequence is a montage that Chang uses to convince his audience that a cut to black is a timely release. Chang uses a wide shot first, then a close up on Ah Chung falling onto the floor, followed by two over-the-shoulder shots and finally, a medium shot of Ah Chung's face, where blood slowly drips down from his head. This medium shot

continues for almost a minute, seemingly to capture the dramatic emotional release that Ah Chung performs. He yells at his father and crushes the glass bottles on his head. However, it is his reaction after this emotional drama is released that catches audience's attention. The camera continues to focus on Ah Chung in the medium shot and allows the audience to see the confusion, loss, and even embarrassment shown on Ah Chung's face. These emotional releases precisely disclose Ah Chung's frustration. He had joined the dance practice in order to make his mother happy, but he would never expect to become an accessory to Ah Ming's murder. He sees this incident as one of the unlucky things that occur to him. The problem is that he cannot do anything to stop them from happening to him or to make them right. This one-minute long shot that Chang intentionally uses not only captures Ah Chung's emotional breakdown, but also catches what happens after emotions are released and the drama is done. The audience is confronted with the situation that Chang leaves for it to consider.

A cut to black timely enters the screen for Chang to move the audience away from the strictly personal moment into a more situated space with an ensuing shot of the empty site. It is the place where Ah Chung practices ritual dance and where members of a local gang meet. Here, the camera stays on the scene and shows Ah Chung quietly approaching a group of gang members talking, picking up a steel stick from the box of the dance props, and searching for the head of the gang. When the head of the gang responds to Ah Chung's call and walks up to him, Ah Chung cannot even utter a word to respond to the gang leader's question of why Ah Chung is asking for him. Ah Chung trashes things on the table, smashes the television, and destroys any workable objects in the area until one

of the gang members speaks up to convince the leader and his followers that Ah Chung's deviant behaviors simply result from his puberty. These deviant behaviors demonstrate his anger toward the leader, who had used him to track down Ah Ming and murder him. The problem is that he could not prove this conspiracy theory. A long, uninterrupted shot vividly documents how Ah Chung yells, expressing serious anger, smashes everything in sight, and then leaves. Ah Chung apologizes to the gang leader for the destruction on his way out of this place. This shot stops at the scene where the leader looks towards the direction in which Ah Chung leaves, and a cut to black discontinues this shot. These scenes stress the broader context and implications of Ah Chung's anger and demonstrate how a clever and upright person Ah Chung is. During his destruction of the scene, he learns to swallow his doubts and to stop digging into the cause of Ah Ming's murder because he cannot afford to get involved in the gang's affairs.

In the three scenes that constitute the climax of *Ah Chung*, Chang uses this cutting syntax very consistently: a cut to black always appears to stop an upsurge of emotion and to turn the audience's interest to different parts of Ah Chung's life. Cut to black does not function as a transition from the conflict to the resolution in order for the audience to reach catharsis. Instead, Chang's cut to black delays this arrival at catharsis and pressures the audience to become aware of the fictional yet solidly realized time and space in the film world. Cuts to black in these scenes of the climax allow the audience to keep the three situations in mind and to consider their relations in a larger context. The climax starts with a cut to black followed by Ah Chung leaving the site where he practices the ritual dance, and then it ends with Ah Chung reentering the scene. The film score also

follows this pattern, with the music only accompanying Ah Chung, not the film sequence's logic. This use of the score has its parallels in form. Music comes to the screen after Ah Chung leaves the place where he practices the ritual dance and gradually fades out when Ah Chung finds Ah Ming. It comes back into the scene when Ah Chung returns to the place to seek for justice for Ah Ming's murder and fades out when he leaves the scene and the screen cuts to black. When a cut to black ends the scene where the lead gang member looks in the direction towards which Ah Chung exists, the score also fades out. The next shot is a landscape shot that echoes the opening of the film. This echoing of the film's opening steadily pushes the film narrative to move from the climax to the epilogue using the citation of a prior image, not a narrative arc.

### ***Ah Chung: Acquiring a New Sense of Film Narrative through Cuts to Black***

The cut to black appearing after Ah Chung leaves the place where he learns the ritual dance also suspends the audience's speculation about what will happen to Ah Chung in his social circle. The ensuing shot set in Ah Chung's house shows Ah Min sitting at the dining table and her mother keeping her company without speaking a word. Soon, the shot jumps to another scene in the house where Ah Chung is kneeling in front of the ancestral shrine. The scene in the place where Ah Chung learns the ritual dance goes before the cut to black, and the scenes in Ah Chung's house comes after it. The two seemingly irrelevant shots immediately detach the audience from the conflicts revealed in the climax of Ah Chung's story. It switches the focus of the film narrative from Ah Chung's witnessing of Ah Ming's murder to the attention that he receives from the family

and the question of how he will live after it. This switch in focus indeed challenges the audience about what the narrative does not show, possibly confusing them by leaving out conventional scenes like Ah Chung's return home with the horrible news; yet, it links to the narrative from before the climax, which shows how family remains substantial in Ah Chung's life.



Figure 5: Montage transitioning from the murder scene to how Ah Chung and his family respond to the murder.

This linkage back to the narrative of Ah Chung's family after this particular cut to black not only links the tragedy to the narrative revealed in the opening sequence, but also highlights the importance and continuity of family rather than the shock of a particular moment. As Figure 5 shows, Chang signals this cinematographically by changing the cutting rhythms as well. What follows the cut to black are takes of longer duration, showing scenes in Ah Chung's house. Significantly, the characters in these scenes do not have conversations or physical interactions, but their sorrow, worry, and loss are vividly captured, leaving the audience to fill in the "missing" conventional script elements for themselves. The black screen along with these silent shots create a space for the audience to settle for themselves the emotions aroused by the climax.

Soon, another cut to black ends these scenes in the house, but the ensuing shots again move to provide context, showing the settings where Ah Chung, his younger brother, and grandfather used to spend time together, but leaving these sets completely empty of human life. These empty landscapes simply show the backgrounds of locales where Ah Chung used to spend time together with his family and may remind the audience of those happier times. They force the audience into acts of recognition. Each of the empty landscape shots is eight to ten seconds long on the screen, giving the audience ample time to process emotion for themselves, perhaps recalling the earlier happy memories that the film showed as a way to ease the sense of oppression and heaviness that this silent space evokes. Then, another time is introduced into the film. As Ah Chung continues to practice ritual dance while waiting for his family to talk to him again, an unexpected death strikes again and forces the family to unite together. New experiences supplant the old in the film, disjunctively, and the film narrative does not provide the connection for the audience; it only offers the fact that the old and the new events happened in the same places to the same people.

The given space constituted by the black screen and the ensuing empty landscape shots continue to accommodate various complicated emotions aroused by the three scenes of the climax rather than narrating what the audience is supposed to feel. It offers the audience a scenario providing a different kind of closure to Ah Chung's story, shown from a different perspective again. Here, Chang returns to the third person point of view position he established at the beginning of the film, but now that perspective takes on a different meaning for an audience that now has acquired a self-aware point of view,

requiring it to figure out for itself how Ah Chung's story is going to end rather than simply being led to such conclusions by the film narrative. The closing of Chang's films always come with surprises that leave audiences with room to ponder over what it has been shown and experienced and to reconsider again what the film means for it.

Now the third person point of view has become the space for self-awareness, a space where the audience has come to recognize the distance shots of the empty landscape close to Ah Chang's house, framed by the black screen, as echoing the set-up that had introduced Ah Chung's family to the audience for the first time at the start of the film. With the possible emotional and logical scenarios set up by the family issues, climax, and aftermaths, the audience would have expected to see how Ah Chung's family will deal with these unpredicted misfortunes. After a nearly 90-second silence, the sound that breaks the silence on the screen is a phone ringing, a piercing sound over a close take of pigeons resting on the patio outside the house. Shortly after that piercing noise, a cut to black ends the scene, after Ah Chung watches his mother rushing out from the house with her scooter. Here, Chang makes his continuity not by following an emotional arc, but by spaces. As the audience stares at a black screen for eight seconds, the sound from the next scene gradually emerges on the screen, followed by Ah Chung's voiceover a few seconds later. That voiceover explains the reason why his mother had rushed out of the house and goes on to describe what people witnessed at his grandfather's sudden death—a kind of flashback. Then, an ensuing shot takes the audience to see the families standing close to each other in the grandfather's funeral.

Instead of showing how Ah Chung's family survives these misfortunes as a narrative resolution, Chang Tso-Chi features Ah Chung's mother in the last 10 minutes of the film. During the film, the audience sees Ah Chung's mother putting on a lot of make-up, returning home late at night, and carrying a bag with a tacky yellow dress in it. She is also shown as a diligent mother who cooks, does laundry, and makes plans for her children and father. These sporadic shots featuring Ah Chung's mother have actually been inserted all over the film, but they only come together to make sense in the last part of the film, when their density increases and the audience begins to question what has been shown but not seen.

Although Ah Chung's mother is devastated by her father's death, she goes to work and takes Ah Chung with her in the evening. For the first time, the audience begins to understand those sporadic shots focusing on this mother figure. From Ah Chung's point of view, the audience sees his mother in the tacky yellow dress with clown make-up doing an embarrassing performance on an outdoor stage and the guests who attend the wedding banquet enjoying the supposedly comical show. Yet, Ah Chung does not laugh as the banquet guests do, but simply focuses on his mother's performance. As the comical music continues to fade away, a shot of the empty landscape outside Ah Chung's house cuts in to direct the audience's attention to a morning when Ah Chung's mother takes him to attend a temple fair. Ah Chung's voiceover appears for the last time on the shots showing their participation in this ritual fair. By featuring this mother feature, the audience is simply given an example of how a mother continues to support her children even before she overcomes her sorrow for the loss of her father and frustration about Ah

Chung's involvement in Ah Ming's murder. She has been the visual blank point of the narrative, but now emerges with an indispensable part that completes Ah Chung's story.



Figure 6: Montage of Ah Chung's opening



Figure 7: Montage of Ah Chung's close

The last scene of *Ah Chung* is set on the riverside, with Ah Chung and his siblings sitting side-by-side chatting and making fun of each other. This is the first time the audience sees them appearing happily together, at a place where Grandfather used to spend a lot of time strolling, pondering, and playing Suona horn. After Ah Chung's sister returns home with a broken leg, she joins together with her siblings at the place where Ah Chung's grandfather and intellectually disabled younger brother used to sing songs and play the horn. Although she had run away from home at a young age, she rejoined her siblings in singing and playing upon her return as if she never left home at all.

Closing the film with this scene not only echoes many scenes throughout the film that took place on the riverside, but also reinforces the audience's impression of these scenes where characters' happy memories are saved. Looking at their witty chats and relaxed interactions, the audience's feelings for heavy and complicated emotions caused by the misfortunes that *Ah Chung* revealed seems to be lifted. It is at this uplifting moment that a cut to black again comes in and ends the film. Staring at the solid black screen, the audience still listens to their laughs, envisions their continuing on with their lives in its harsh conditions, and sees the family continuing in a world full of hardship rather than focusing on tragedy and trauma.

*Ah Chung* begins with sound over a solid black screen and ends with sound over a lingering solid black screen. The audience, by this point, will have learned to use the spaces that the filmmaker provides them, as it notes how this scene echoes the film's climax. This narrative consistency of the cut to black sequences brings the audience to experience a more thoughtful, poetic narrative about life, rather than a tragic one, and leaves the audience with a profound sense of how the shots arranged before and after a cut to black echo each other, rather than cause or are caused by each other. Although *Ah Chung* evades documenting the real-life misfortunes of a family like this, the audience can enter the film in a more relaxed mood and leave it with a sense of contemplation or contentment after experiencing a form of catharsis that focuses on the conditions of life (including death) rather than on evil, failure, or catastrophe. Most importantly, Chang's film syntax does not simply *give* the audience a sense of contentment. Rather, that audience has to be actively engaged in making sense of the film in order to obtain this

contentment. By following a series of shots, each linked disjunctively with a cut to black, the audience experiences a series of mixed emotions. With patience and interest, they can come to realize that emotions are difficult to articulate and thus are hard to reconcile or be set aside in any formulaic way. Through experiencing emotions as complicated as *Ah Chung* presents, the audience learns to appreciate that a film narrative needs not to tell its story in one way and that a variety of film genres can be interesting without necessarily catering to audience's need for entertainment.

### **Cuts to Black: A Rhythmic Punctuation**

Up to this point, I have analyzed how cut to black is used in the beginning, the middle, and the closing of *Ah Chung*. From the viewer's point of view, the cut to black is used to attract the audience's attention, to excite its awareness of its viewing position, and to challenge the assumption of narrative continuity between shots. This editing technique hinders the audience's intuitive emotional responses in one sense. It further reinforces the segments of film narrative and links these segments together associatively to make a complete film with echoes and comparisons rather than conventional logics based on shots surrounding a single event.

The interplays of a cut or fade to black with other visual shots create segments of compare and contrast that help the audience to understand the film. But my claims for Chang Tso-Chi's conscious use of these techniques as a narrative device still need to be bolstered through a study of his evolution as a filmmaker. It is impossible for Chang Tso-Chi to develop his unique film style simply with *Ah Chung*. He has to continue

filmmaking in order to establish his cinema with self-sustained logic in order for the audience to learn to distinguish his cinema from others.

In his article, Lu Feii does examine shot/reverse shot cutting in Chang's *Darkness*, arguing that Chang subverts this widely assumed real time/space cutting by suturing the protagonist's psychological space with the real time/space.<sup>9</sup> But Lu's analysis stops at the level of how Chang subverts the norm-bound cutting convention and the widely accepted construction of meaning without taking into consideration the film as a whole. How the audience perceives the story through this stylistic cutting that tends to subvert the real world that Chang constructs in his film towards the end of his film and the development of the story remains unsolved.

Based on the previous discussions on cuts to black in *Ah Chung*, I would like to continue my discussion by examining what other salient aspects of the film experience Chang Tso-Chi creates by his consistent use of a solid black screen in his next film. As we shall see, he reduces his use of cuts to black to create emotional-interpretive disjunctions for his audience. In his second feature film, Chang introduces a "fade" to or out of black to produce significant visual effects that challenge the audience's perception of "seeing is believing." With the interplays of a solid black screen and his usual visual shots, including landscape shots, longer time space shot, distance shots and the like, Chang impresses his audience with his stylistic realism.

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<sup>9</sup> Lu Feii, "Guankan heian: guandian, rentong, xieshi zhi chongtan," 55.

## **Fades to Black: Uncovering the Interplays of Audio and Visual Experiences**

*Darkness and Light* (1999) is a story about Kang-Yi, a high school girl who returns home for the summer to Keelung from her school in Taipei. She grew up with an absent mother, a blind father, a grandfather, and an intellectually disabled younger brother, Ah Kee. Her father runs a massage center and hires several blind employees. The family depends on her to connect with the outside world, and through her mediation, the audience gets a glimpse of the world where blind people lead their lives.

The most distinctive difference between the use of a solid black screen in *Darkness* and *Ah Chung* is that the black screen does not suddenly cut into the screen. Instead, the picture gradually fades into black, or the black screen gradually fades out into a picture. This fade into or fade out of black is still a discontinuity, but it not only diminishes the sense of disruption in a film narrative, it also extends the screen time of the solid black screen. In this case, this extension of time further strengthens the contrast between visible shots and the black screen. Chang still uses it to disconnect narrative elements from each other. A cut to black does not simply disappear from *Darkness*. Its continuous appearance with the fade into or out of black as well as the cut out of the black constructs a few more compelling features in film narrative.



Figure 8: The opening of *Darkness and Light*.

The opening of *Darkness* makes the audience stare at a solid black screen for nearly 25 seconds before it fades out of black. The black screen seems to be setting up a contract that allows the audience to gradually acquire two points of view: what the blind hear and what their families see. At the same time, this fade into and out of black establishes a slow pace for the black screen to appear on the screen and forces this experience of the blind—to listen more than to see—on to the audience.

As Figure 8 shows, staring at the solid black screen and listening to the conversation off the screen, the audience's attention is occupied by discerning what happens in the first scene and where it is. An off-screen voice seems to be a photographer talking, and the sound of his flash confirms what the audience has guessed aurally. The audience hears the photographer asking Kang-Yi to talk to her father and to make him feel relaxed. It then hears a girl, an old man, and a little boy speaking up eagerly together to help the father make a good smile for his photograph.

The next shot fading out of this blackness soon reveals the scene in a photography studio to the audience. This very first scene of *Darkness* shows the audience that a couple is standing in front of a canvas that has the scenery the little boy just described verbally when the audience was forced to face the solid black screen. This first scene thus

establishes for the audience in very subtle terms that the couple is blind and that their families are behind the camera helping them to pose and make the right faces for their wedding photo. When the photographer counts down to the second, he takes another photo. With the sound of the flashbulb, the first scene cuts to black again. Staring at the second black screen, Chang's audience comes to realize that the opening has brought the audience to experience the darkness that the blind couple faces. The audience receives only the information it hears, not what is visually present in the scene. In this dark space of hearing alone, the audience is introduced to the title of the film and listens to a short conversation between a brother and his older sister. However, this is not a deprived or empty space. The question-and-response exchange between the siblings is amusing and raises the audience's curiosity, just as it must have among the blind listeners in the film. A second scene soon appears to introduce the protagonist, Kang-Yi, to the audience as its guide to this world of contrasts between the audio and the visual.

Such an opening that allows the solid black screen to occupy the screen for over 30 seconds makes it immediately evident to audiences that their experience of what is shown on the screen does not always correspond to what it really means. *Darkness's* opening with a 30-second long black screen, a distance shot of a blind couple, and another cut to black establish the two frames of meaning and experience in the film as co-existent but not the same. The screen time of the subsequent black screen lasts over 10 seconds, but again, the film narrative continues to develop with off-screen conversations between characters. Now, the audience cannot feel uneasy facing the black screen because it has again done what it did before, and the sequences have become legible to

audiences. Each time, the off-screen sounds provide the audience with limited information to raise their curiosity about the next scene before it is revealed on the screen, reinforcing the demands the filmmaker is placing on their ears as well as their eyes. Chang's care for his audience by inviting the audience's attention to his deployment of the black screen emerges as a significant story-telling device in *Darkness*. It is a mimic of closing or opening eyelids for the audience to grab a sense of how the story continues to move on with seconds or a minute of visual blackout.

It is important to note that the scene sequences that Chang teaches his audience to read here are much less disconnected or disconcerting than those in *Ah Chung* previous film, even though the screen time of the black screen increases. The black screen in *Darkness* extends the time of the previous scene in order for the audience to dwell on what the scene has shown or has audibly revealed to them off the screen. The audience is again forced into a more active role in making sense of the film because it has to constantly compare the content of a scene as it is heard and as it is seen. Unlike directly cutting to the next shot, the fading into black delays the arrival of the visual content of the next shot and slows down the development of the film narrative. This delay of shot and the slow pace of the film narrative present a drastic contrast to the sense of abruptness and impertinence in *Ah Chung*'s cut to black. As a shot changes from directly cutting to black to slowly fading into black, the screen time of the black screen extends from a few seconds in *Ah Chung* to five or seven seconds in *Darkness*.

Such an extension of the screen time for the fade to black gives the audience an awareness that a smooth film narrative does not simply rely on the direct connection

between shots. Instead, it relies on the persistence of the audience's vision for a set of shots and how it understands it. *Darkness* further reinforces this use of a sequence of cuts forcing a persistence of vision with yet another example of Chang's delicate deployment of shot, off-screen sounds, and fade to black. The audience comes to comprehend the complicated feelings and meanings a set of shots contain before the screen fades to black and begins to understand the significance of Chang's use of black screen as a significant part of the film's message.

After the second fade to black, the solid black screen fades out and goes to a subject shot that focuses on a teenage girl. Through her, Chang moves away from an experiential difference between seeing and hearing and sets his camera to establish her as an entry point for the audience to enter the world of this film. The framing of this subjective shot has its parallel in a corresponding shot using the window frame in her room. In that shot, she is facing the window and drawing her favorite animals on the window glass. Outside the window is a scene of the sun setting over Keelung harbor. The noise of trucks, motorcycles, cars, and firecrackers comes from off screen to contrast the poetic imagery of this shot.

Beginning with a dissolve, a longer length shot focuses on Kang-Yi's movement in the medium distance when she turns to face the camera. She gradually walks out of her room and passes down a long corridor that connects her room, her parents' room, the living room, two guest rooms, and the kitchen on the other side of the apartment. The camera uses her as a focus guide, but not as the sole focus for the sequence: it backs up to enter the corridor first and tracks to keep a medium distance from her as she moves

closer. She keeps her head up and uses her hands to touch the door curtains, posters or paintings on the wall, as if it is her first time visiting this place. At this point, the film score is grafted onto the scene and gradually covers the off-screen noises. Following the tempo of the film score, she strolls along the long corridor with a smile and slowly approaches the kitchen. This 43-second long shot captures her passing through the layers of lights and shadows that the corridor lighting causes. Shots that portray her strolling dissolve into one another to create a distinctive visual effect, as if she were walking in a fantasy. This montage presents a romantic and naïve protagonist to the audience.

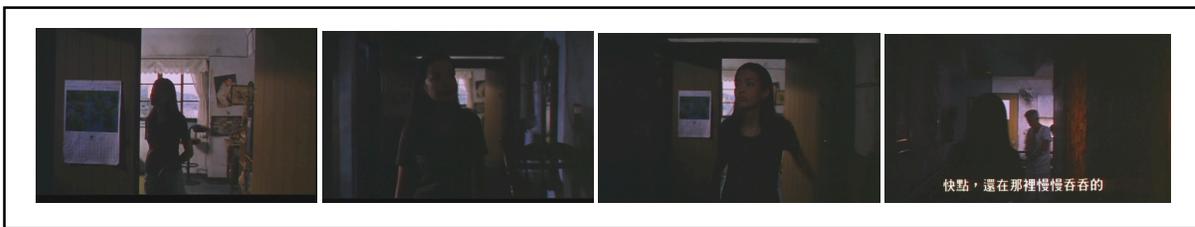


Figure 9: Montage introducing Kang-Yi to the audience for the first time

Kang-Yi's stroll down the long corridor of light and shadow does not come to an end until her grandfather calls to her to do household chores. As Figure 9 reveals, the camera stops at the corridor to observe her setting the table and bickering with her younger sibling, shown from a medium distance. When the doorbell rings off screen, Ah Kee rushes past the camera. The off-screen sounds soon convey how happily family members see the newly wedded couple returning from their honeymoon. The camera continues to focus on Kang-Yi finishing setting the table in the kitchen. Unlike other family members who reveal their joy with their off-screen greetings, the 68-second long take on her calmly setting the table dissolves to a shot showing her strolling down the

long corridor again following the tempo of the film score. This time, she slowly approaches the crowd at the doorway. The camera steadily follows her movement and stops when the off-screen sounds gradually unify with the picture. It observes in a distance how Kang-Yi joins the crowd smiling, helps her father carry the bags, and distributes gifts to the family members. A fade to black comes in to end this scene full of cheerful greetings and lively interactions, to which Kang-Yi has been our guide and tours us around different sites in this apartment. She also inhabits this space deeply enmeshed in all its aspects, from the mundane to the celebratory.

### **Interplays of Cuts and Fades to Black: Tuning into Rhythm**

The slow-paced yet joyful atmosphere established by the opening of *Darkness* lingers on the solid black screen, which is deliberately extended for the audience to enjoy during its visual blackout. The scene that follows shows Kang-Yi's family members sitting at the round table and eating together, directly cutting onto the screen rather than fading into it. The blind family members are asking Kang-Yi and those who can see to put more food in their bowls. This eating scene adds an unadorned twist to the film narrative, as Kang-Yi's life is about to go from joyfulness to dullness. The mundane tasks crop up in the midst of her joyous moments. What follows the eating scene is a close take of the drawings that Kang-Yi left on the window glass in her room. The camera pans from the window to the posters on the wall and stops at the scene where Kang-Yi is feeding her pet turtle in a small glass tank. Off-screen sounds coming from outside of her room do not prevent her from enjoying the world she creates with furnishings and

decoration, but leads the camera into their location to reveal a different kind of space that parallels hers. The camera continues to outline the spaces that may not cohere, but “belong” together in this apartment. Standing outside of a bedroom’s door, the doorframe corresponding to the camera frame prevents the audience from intruding into the room of Kang-Yi’s stepmother, Bao-huei. In this long shot, the audience sees her in the distance, calling into a live radio show and singing to the show’s audience. In her room, Kang-Yi’s intellectually disabled younger brother, Ah Kee, sits comfortably on a chair and yawns, enjoying her singing. The audience sees disconnects between the lives in the various rooms of this apartment. Without any warning, a cut to black ends this scene.

This cut to black decisively interrupts the lingering joyful atmosphere created by Bao-huei’s singing and Ah Kee’s relaxed enjoyment. The next scene cuts in to show Kang-Yi and Ah Kee wearing colored wigs and chatting nonsensically in her room. Again, the camera stays outside of the room door and observes their close interactions. The next scene stays in Kang-Yi’s room showing Ah Kee sitting alone at the window and talking to his friend on a toy phone. The camera enters the room, keeps a distance, and captures Ah Kee from behind. The beautiful scenery of Keelung harbor at night and the ship horn blowing in the distance appear in the background of this indoor shot from Kang-Yi’s room and create a sense of serenity connected to a world beyond the glass. What follows is a 16-second long shot looking at the long corridor from Kang-Yi’s room. The corridor that was dim and full of joy with people’s greetings and chatting is now bright and vacant. Families and friends return to their rooms and turn on the lights that brighten up the enclosed shadowy corridor. The lively joyful atmosphere presented in the

opening of *Darkness* seems to linger in the corridor, but no one is present in it. Staring at the empty corridor for 16 seconds creates a strong sense of loneliness or isolation and brings the audience to experience a drastic comparison and contrast of the long corridor that was full of joy and cheering minutes ago. A cut to black ends this long shot as well as the prologue of the film.

The closing of the prologue leaves the audience with a good sense of what the cut to black will require of it as it watches the film. After the introduction of Kang-Yi and her family members, the cut to black appears to interrupt the continuity of a joyful and happy ambience before it introduces the daily life of the family members to the audience. By juxtaposing two scenes occurring in Kang-Yi's room and Bao-huei's room, the audience gets a glimpse of how the characters continue their lives after the celebration of a wedding and the welcoming of the newly wedded couple from their honeymoon. The tendency to indulge in the joyful atmosphere continues, but is gradually tuned to focus on the mundane rather than the celebration. Three scenes appear after the cut to black to show that Kang-Yi lives with a big family under the same roof and that they always eat together chatting at a big round table. But most of the time, each of them leads his or her own life. Even Ah Kee is no exception. Unlike other properly socialized characters, Ah Kee's intellectual disabilities demand constant attention from the family, and his entering the rooms of his stepmother and sister with no restriction seems to confirm this demand. He is sometimes left alone. As the scene describes, he is able to enjoy himself by talking on a toy phone. Staring at the empty scene for 16 seconds further confirms each family

member's existence in a private moment. The cut to black comes in to end the prologue and the celebration of the joyful event.

### **Fades to Black and Landscape Shots: Opening up Space between Visible Shots**

After this cut to black, *Darkness* does not simply move on with a story about Kang-Yi after this cut to black. Instead, a landscape shot of the apartment building's atrium pulls the audience out from Kang-Yi's apartment into the outdoors. The camera begins with a bird's-eye view of the atrium before it turns to focus on the veranda where Kang-Yi skates with her roller-skates and plays with her brother. This switch from a domestic interior to a site outside of the apartment highlights the importance of the surroundings again and draws the audience to look at how landscape shots in this film set up this story geographically.

Different from how landscape shots set up Ah Chung's story in the first few minutes, Chang takes the first 20 minutes or so to set up the story of *Darkness* geographically. Landscape shots appear before segments of narrative occur to show the audience how the story goes. In the segment that introduces the audience to Ping, who later dates Kang-Yi briefly, two landscape shots enter the screen before the story scene. After a cut to black, a landscape shot of Keelung harbor shows an overview of this city harbor and its neighboring districts. The second landscape shot focuses on the atrium of Kang-Yi's apartment building from the bottom, as if from its roots. The landscape shot of Keelung harbor appears again after a fade to black gives the audience an expectation as to how the story of Kang-Yi's life goes. However, the story scene that follows

introduces the audience to Ping and characters with whom he is involved. These deployments of the cut or fade to black followed by the landscape shot of Keelung harbor or the apartment building's atrium juxtapose story scenes that tells Kang-Yi's story and those that shows Ping's. Their two seemingly irrelevant storylines will eventually meet in the surroundings these landscape shots constructed with the camera's steady panning movement. When they meet later in the film, the audience will then become aware of why Chang spends so much effort constructing the surroundings. These sites are not event structures used to make the backbone of Kang-Yi's story. They have become part of the film's narrative.



Figure 10: A shot of the atrium appearing after the scenes that introduce Kang-Yi and Ping to audiences respectively

The deployment of the cut or fade to black with the landscape shot demonstrates Chang's intention of alienating the audience's gaze from filmmaking conventions that emphasize expressing drama, plot, or tension on the screen. When the audience of this film becomes accustomed to the juxtaposition of the cut or the fade to black with the landscape shot, it has learned that Chang is not simply making a change of scene. He is developing a narrative twist, a shift in the film's frame of significant information. When

Ping first appears in the scene after the prologue of this film, he seems to be a random passenger. He enters the scene where Kang-Yi and her father's employee are waiting for a customer and asks them about directions to an apartment unit in the same building. The cut to black after this scene seems to break the film's sequence pattern of the landscape shot following a cut to black. A landscape shot of the atrium *precedes* this cut to black. After this cut to black, the film makes a direct cut to a shot of nearly a minute-long duration on the screen. This scene is done from behind Ping's back and portrays him facing the big waves. Ping stands on a rock on the seashore, picks up small rocks from the shore, and throws them to the air for batting. After the audience stares at Ping's batting with a wood stick for 50 seconds, a landscape shot of Keelung harbor enters the screen again.

The film has led the audience to expect this sequence to have run differently: this cut to black should have appeared 10 seconds earlier. After this variation of the standard sequence syntax of a cut or fade to black followed by a landscape shot, the repetition of the atrium around 20:01 here is identical to its first appearance at around 7:42. The camera movement replicates the one that first brought the audience outside of an enclosed space. As the picture on the left in figure 10 shows, the camera first pulled the audience out of Kang-Yi's house after her central role as the point of view was established in the prologue. The picture on the right shows how the camera again pulls the audience out of scenes in an apartment that explain Ping's starting a new life in this neighborhood. By repeating the identical landscape shots of the atrium after the scenes that establish the important roles Kang-Yi and Ping respectively play, Chang uses a cut to

black to end their introduction sequences. The sequence structure and the tie to the atrium set them into an active juxtaposition with each other.

Aside from this example, how Chang deploys the cut to black going before the landscape shot also creates a remarkable visual effect in the scene where a negotiation between two gangs turn into a fight. With the sound of a gunshot, Keelung harbor's landscape appears on the screen, but it is outside the camera's focus. Fighting sounds continue to appear off screen, as Ping slowly enters the scene from the right and walks to the focal point of the camera. The camera begins to follow Ping's pace and retains him in a medium shot as he approaches the seashore. The fight sounds are gradually replaced by the ocean waves. After 50 seconds, Ping stops walking, raises his head, and smiles when he looks up to the sky. What comes next is a 20-second long shot mimicking Ping's point of view, with the camera unstably rocking before it drops straight down from the sky. The landscape of sky, ocean, harbor, and pier appears quickly on the screen and fades into black in less than a second. However, the landscape shot of the pier and the departure of the fishing boat emerges after the fade to black, as if the camera continues Ping's point of view shot before fading into black. At this point, another juxtaposition is established: the camera gradually zooms out and slowly reveals Ping's body lying on the pier. As the camera lenses continue to move without any hesitation when Ping's body appears, rising up from the bottom of the frame, the camera movement continues for a minute before it fades into black. The camera lens moves as if to provide a conventional landscape shot with a departing boat and the flashing lighthouse. The dying Ping is portrayed as yet another of the natural components of that landscape, not any different from it.

The deployment of the landscape shot with the fade to black in the above-mentioned scene not only conforms to the pattern that characterizes Chang's films, but also marks Chang's cinematic style and again demonstrates how he thinks of the film in terms of his chosen resources. In contrast to *Ah Chung's* camera movement that leads the audience into the climax and interrupts the audience's reception of the conflict with several cuts to black, the camera in *Darkness* never intrudes into the scene where Ping wrestles with other gang members. Instead, the camera remains in place, keeps its distance, and observes the fight from its established point of view, not being drawn into the space of the fight itself. The camera's own detached position in this case, with the shot of long duration, makes it more difficult for the audience to understand the story's development. The insertion of landscape shots and their average screen time of 15 seconds further distract the audience's attention from the story elements, defined conventionally, and onto some other big picture. And in *Darkness*, off-screen sounds do not generally create a sound bridge to connect two shots. They seem rather to prevent the audience from looking for drama or standard employment on the screen. A close shot of Ping walking away from the fighting scene appears when the audience's focus on the story has repeatedly been interrupted by the landscape shots of the fishing piers. Looking at Ping's moving away from the fight scene, the audience is led away from the conflicts between the two gangs and into the landscape. The next shot reemphasizes this point. Ping's point of view shot allows the audience finally to see what was in Ping's gaze. Ping is losing consciousness with uncontrollable shaking steps while gazing at the sky. Ping swoons as the audience shortly is confronted with a black screen.

This is the first time in *Darkness* that Chang uses a point of view shot for a character, and it is interesting that it is used to get the audience to gaze at the landscape and a solid black screen. This employment of a point of view shot—one that allows the audience to identify with Ping and to see what Ping sees—with an immediate fade to black to emulate the character's losing consciousness is certainly not provoking, but it is visually rich. Chang particularly stresses that his use of this point of view shot is to evoke the closing scene of *Léon: The Professional* (1994).<sup>10</sup>

This point of view shot allows the audience to identify with Ping and to gaze at the sky as he does, but does not offer the audience a direct answer to questions such as why Ping insists on leaving the fight scene and what the sky means to him. As in *Ah Chung*, this insertion of lingering landscape shots into *Darkness* also slows down the story development and creates islands of serenity out of which Ping seems to obtain the strength to face his death. After the fade to black, the camera movement gradually separates the audience from Ping's line of sight and shifts to a landscape shot to allow the audience to consider Ping's unfortunate death. Seeing the lingering landscape shot with Ping's body revealed at the bottom of this frame, a well-timed fade to black closes the scene of the gang fight and intercepts any possible rising of emotions in the audience that might otherwise have been generated by Ping's death.

The deployment of landscape shots and fade to black develops a space that hosts the audience's emotions that are aroused by the story as it approaches its ending. Kang-Yi overhears the news of Ping's death from neighbors and soon experiences her father's

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<sup>10</sup> Cheng, Ping-Hung, "Zouchu Changlang: Fang Chang Tso-Chi," 196.

death. The audience remains unclear how she handles her sorrows because Chang does not portray her crying on the screen. Instead, he uses the camera to reveal that Kang-Yi is drawn into the mundane routines of housework. These portrayals often juxtapose Kang-Yi's cheerful interaction with Ah Khee in the beginning of the film. Kang-Yi continues to lead Ah Khee to do household chores, but she does not have a conversation with him. The camera remains static in the distance to portray her doing chores, but she often leaves the scene right away to find other chores to do. These story scenes that used to be full of cheer and talking have now become often silent shots lingering on the empty spaces before fades to black enter the screen to end them. It is not until the recurring scene in which Ah Khee talks on a toy phone reappears that the audience finds out that Kang-Yi also cries and suffers from mourning all the time in her private moments. Chang creates landscape shots of longer duration, followed by fades to black, to create a space in which the audience is forced to confront different ways of mourning.

As these sporadic spaces created by landscape shots connecting with fades to black recur, they begin to form a pattern in which other emotions that come with mourning are also assessed. Before the closing scenes, the camera once again brings the audience to the place where Ping died, but it maintains a detached distance to show the audience only a serene landscape where villagers sit on the other side of the pier, the fishing boat is departing, and the sound of the fishing boat's engine fills the landscape with its sound. In the lower center of this landscape, the audience recognizes Kang-Yi, her stepmother, and her grandfather sitting on the pier and turning their backs to the camera. After 21 seconds, a cut to a closer shot directed at their backs, when the camera

begins to move slowly from left to right, observes their sitting side-by-side chatting. The audience has no way of understand their conversations because the camera never approaches them close enough to capture what they are saying. In a closer shot that still maintains a detached distance, the audience can see how the grandfather's words amuse Kang-Yi and her stepmother and bring smiles to their faces. It is their smiles that appear on the screen again to bring the film score back to the screen.

This return of the camera to the scene of Ping's death forces the audience to undertake a clear comparison between these two shots that have similar framings, yet contain scenes that conventional cinematography would mark as contradictory emotions. The two scenes have identical frames, but this juxtaposition works to show how characters can still feel amused, even when they are mourning the deceased within their beloved family. The return of the film score to the scene's soundtrack further counteracts any remaining effect of enduring sorrow, and it also strengthens the feelings of amusement, which is delicately preserved in the closing of *Darkness*.

After showing the audience Bao-huei, Kang-Yi, and her grandfather enjoying their time at the Keelung fishing pier, a landscape shot of Keelung harbor, identical to the one taken from Kang-Yi's room window at the start of the film, cuts in to initiate a reverse motion of the camera, which brings the audience back into the apartment from the outside. The camera watches how Kang-Yi and Ah Khee are setting the table in the kitchen, in a direct echo of the opening sequences and their joyful atmosphere. Sounds of fireworks off screen arouses Kang-Yi's curiosity. As she stops setting the table and follows the sounds, she again walks down the long corridor and moves into her room

from the kitchen. The camera is tracking backwards, and it sometimes even jump cuts to another position to continue shooting her from the rear in this motion. Finally, she arrives at her room's window, and the camera switches between shots of her enjoying the fireworks and the fireworks in the sky. When a cut focuses on her widening smile of enjoyment, off-screen sounds such as a doorbell ring and Ah Khee's greetings catch Kang-Yi's attention as well as the audience's. Ah Khee opens the door and says welcome to his father and Ping. The camera continues to focus on Kang-Yi's face and her reaction for 10 more seconds before it cuts to a shot that explains the off-screen sounds 10 seconds later.

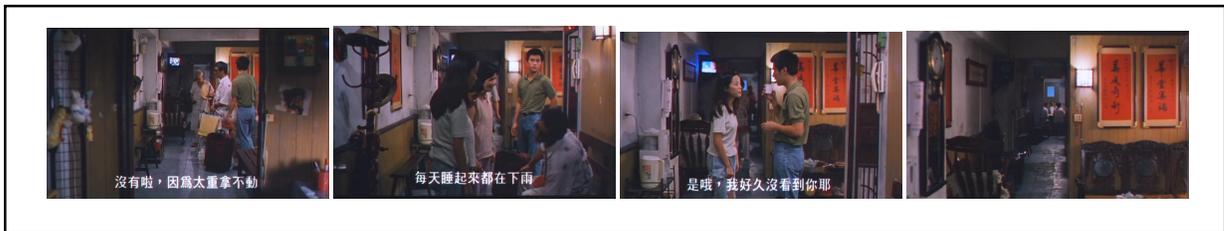


Figure 11: Montage closing in on how Kang-Yi mourns for the loss of her father and Ping.

As Figure 11 shows, this extended, 2:48 minute-long shot focuses on the long corridor from Kang-Yi's room before the camera slowly tracks toward the entrance of the apartment. The camera stops at a medium distance from the entrance and portrays the family greeting Kang-Yi's father and Ping. Kang-Yi joins the crowd, and then the camera moves closer to her and Ping when they have a conversation. As both of them also walk toward the kitchen to get food, the camera eventually stops at the entrance to the room and focuses on the family having a meal. It observes this happy reunion at the table for almost a minute before a fade to black screen ends the long-shot sequence. After the fade

to black, a scene fades out of the black and brings the audience back to the photography studio that has opened *Darkness*. This time, it is Kang-Yi in her wedding gown taking a family photo. As the photographer counts down and sets off the flash, the picture freezes on the screen for seconds before it fades to black and ends *Darkness*.

The epilogue of *Darkness* begins with Kang-Yi, her stepmother, and grandfather meeting at Keelung harbor. This scene is similar to the last scene of *Ah Chung* and further develops into an impressive ending that underscores the audience's responsibility for making sense of the film. The last scene of *Ah Chung* was a nearly one-minute-long shot that shows Ah Chung and his sibling getting together at the riverside where their grandfather used to stay before he passed away. Their easy banter and reunion leave the audience with a seemingly happy ending. Following this pattern, *Darkness* not only brings Kang-Yi and her family members together at the Keelung harbor, but also reveals how they regain their smiles. Chang's use of his film score and his choice of panning the camera slowly from left to right further reinforces this scene's function as reinforcing a sense of relief from the sorrow.

Interestingly, the epilogue of *Darkness* does not simply follow the pattern that *Ah Chung* establishes, which again attests to Chang's active exploration of his chosen cutting tools. Instead, the epilogue advances to transcend the realistic story world by suturing the protagonist's psychological world with the real world.<sup>11</sup> The blind world and seeing world of the opening sequence are transformed into one in which Kang-Yi's fantasy can

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<sup>11</sup> See Lu for detailed analysis of how Chang uses shot/reverse shot to establish a sense of the realistic world in the story.

be realized. The epilogue employs the same scenes and the framings from the prologue, which reinforces this sense of coherence of *Darkness*. This epilogue also highlights a set of scenes from an evening when a real electrical blackout occurs. After a cut to black and the emergence of off-screen sounds that usher in the next scene, the audience sees Kang-Yi's families asking each other if they are fine as they look for candles and flashlights. What follows this blackout scene is a shot that shows Kang-Yi standing in front of her window with a flashlight hanging on her wrist. She puts her elbows on the windowsill, and her hands support her head. The next two shots have the camera switch between two positions. First, the camera focuses on Kang-Yi from outside the window, and then it reverses the shot to show the audience Kang-Yi's point of view. Kang-Yi smiles as she gazes at the street where Ping is waiting. When the audience sees Kang-Yi's smile becoming wider, the sequence cuts to Kang-Yi entering the street scene and running to Ping, and they begin to kiss. These shot reverse shots create a kind of visual confusion because Kang-Yi appears in two different places in the two scenes in the sequence. They cause a willful disruption of traditional continuity. This confusion is cleared up when Ah Khee, carefully holding a candle in his hands, approaches her from behind and asks her why she is dozing off. Kang-Yi's reaction to Ah Khee's question and this interruption enables the audience to realize that the scene of Ping kissing Kang-Yi on the street takes place in her mind. An active audience would soon realize that the camera has delicately sneaked into her psyche of a dream world and presented to the audience what she imagines.

This kind of sequence-switching between the story world and the character's psychological world first appeared in the prologue's blackout scenes; its re-occurrence at the end offers the audience a final lesson of how to decode the meaning of the cut or fade to black. The real blackout hinders Kang-Yi's vision as a kind of blindness, but it actually also creates a space where she can have a moment alone and escape from the confinement of her family into what she desires. Her ability to imagine, the juxtaposition of a similar scene from the epilogue, gives her the strength to grieve. Kang-Yi's response to the blackout and her way of mourning remind the audience that black spaces offer chances to withdraw into one's self to find the strength to face tragedies presented on the screen.

### **From Cuts to Fades to Black: A Point to Finding Meaning**

Critics of the above point have not necessarily read how Chang structures meaning into his continuity editing via cuts and fades to black as I do. The solid black screen with continuity editing techniques that Chang uses to uncover a sense of film in *Ah Chung* and *Darkness* wins him praise in Busan, Korea and Tokyo, Japan, where festival organizers often invite western critics to select films for competition. He uses these two films to show critics that he has grasped of a set of conventions—norm-bound practices—and to demonstrate that filmic language comprises visual effects ranging from the quickly learned to specific skills requiring more learning to highly specialized skills. As publications on how to read and understand a film text from the perspective of continuity editing show, even the easily learned visual effects are confined to institutional

constraints, peer norms, craft guidelines and the like.<sup>12</sup> I have examined how Chang uses the cut to black in *Ah Chung* as well as the transition from cuts to fades to black and the interplays of these two film editing techniques with landscape shots and shot/reverse shot in *Darkness*. These film-editing techniques employed by Chang further develop into a style of cinematic narratives. How Chang uses the syntax of cutting to make sequences amply explains why his films are award-winning films, and he is at the same time able to make them accessible to audience groups raised on conventional cinematic techniques. Although the cut or fade to black carves out blanks in film narrative that not only (in traditional fashion) create transitions between scenes but also require audiences to fill in the story on the basis of parallel scenes, the story nonetheless continues as a coherent narrative whose visual framings work against conventional acts of story-telling.

Whether audiences are able or not able to fill in the blanks that the cut or fade to black creates in his films, the challenge that Chang Tso-Chi poses with his films continues to invite his audience to acquire an active response to watching film. He builds into his films almost completely explicit training on how to read his cuts and how to structure the film narrative in ways that resist the kinds of coherence that conventional narrative cinema surrounding a single event tends to follow. Particularly, he is trying to train the audience to realize that identifying with the characters is one of many ways to appreciate how a film tells the story. Blank spaces and sound—not only conventional story-telling focused around an individual—also contribute significantly to what a film sequence means.

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<sup>12</sup> David Bordwell, *The Poetics of Cinema*, 138; Mette Hjort, *Rules and Conventions*, 20.

I believe that Chang's experiments with cut or fade to black in his films is his attempt to open up filmmakers' options in filmmaking by showing the audience that sophisticated camera work and cutting does not need to simply be labeled as audience-unfriendly, elite, or art cinema. Chang's persistent efforts to produce quality films and to sustain filmmaking in an era that has become ever more market driven should be recognized as fostering film literacy—a claim that being able to watch a film is different from being able to appreciate a film. This cultivation of such film literacy in an audience accustomed to conventional cinema remains an urgent task that institutions should be able to fulfill.

The critical intervention that Chang poses to the audience is this question of what it means to watch a film, when he unveils that a film is a story and a form of representation that can muddle together psychology and realities in ways that can mislead an audience that is not watchful. This question not only brings Chang's audiences to reevaluate this act of watching a film, but also challenges filmmakers to reconsider this act of filmmaking. Chang's films demonstrate that he does not have a simple answer to this question, but that he has been trying to create a group of audiences to explore possible answers. After all, any film director, whether an auteur or an amateur, has an audience group in mind.

## Chapter Two

### Finding a Way Home: “Magic” and “Realism” in

#### *The Best of Times* (2002)

An artist really speaks his own language. He is like a tree which has put its root down exactly where it was born. If he were transplanted, he would miss that vital nourishment, physical, physiological, and spiritual, of his own tradition and culture.<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

After Chang Tso-chi collected three major awards and thus found himself placing at the top of the winner's list at the Tokyo International Film Festival in 1999, NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) selected to support his next project, the production of *The Best of Times* in Taiwan and the release of this co-production through NHK Asian Film Festival (1995-2011).<sup>2</sup> As NHK's statement on its archive website asserts, this film festival was established not only to foster cross-cultural understanding but also to contribute to the film industry in Asia.<sup>3</sup> Over the 12 years of its existence, this film festival has helped four films from Taiwan to be produced. This number is surpassed only by Iran and mainland China. It showcases a program that confirms their support for Taiwanese film productions.

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<sup>1</sup> Bert Cardullo, *Federico Fellini* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2006), 32.

<sup>2</sup> Jon Herskovitz, “Darkness’ lights up Tokyo,” *Variety* (7 Nov. 1999). <http://variety.com/1999/film/news/darkness-lights-up-tokyo-1117757830/> (accessed 5 Feb. 2015).

<sup>3</sup> “Aims and History.” *Archives of NHK Asian Film Festival*, n.d. [http://www.nhk.or.jp/sun-asia/aff/about/index\\_e.html](http://www.nhk.or.jp/sun-asia/aff/about/index_e.html) (accessed 5 Feb. 2015)

The selection of *The Best* to compete for the Golden Lion at the 59<sup>th</sup> Venice Film Festival showed that Europe-based film festivals also paid attention to the works produced by award-winning directors in Asian film festivals.<sup>4</sup> In this way, the reception of Taiwanese films in the West could be read as a form of the globalized film industry, but these achievements was not at all random chance. The path that *The Best* had traveled traces a route that showcases how the purportedly one-way dissemination of film culture—from the west to East Asia—can become a two-way street.

The film's international reception at film festivals advertised it as a Japan/Taiwan production, demonstrating to the west inter-regional cultural exchange and cooperation and garnering western film festival audiences' interest in Taiwan.<sup>5</sup> But its failure to collect any significant awards at such festivals have stalled broader consideration of the innovations that Chang Tso-chi and his filmmaking practices have brought to Taiwan's film industry. Still, one must not forget that *The Best* was one of the top 10 grossing domestic productions of the year 2001 in Taiwan.<sup>6</sup>

This gap in public acclaim sets the stage for this chapter's project, which will analyze *The Best* from two perspectives. First, the chapter discusses how Chang continues to develop his cinematography to advance his distinctive approach to filmic narrative, a style that not only wins him admission to film festivals but also slowly garners the local audience's attention and popular reception. Second, the chapter

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<sup>4</sup> “Mei li shi guang (2001).” *IMDb*, n.d.

<sup>5</sup> “The Best of Times (2002).” *The New York Times*, n.d.  
<http://www.nytimes.com/movies/movie/272716/The-Best-of-Times/overview> (accessed 5 Feb. 2015)

<sup>6</sup> Wang Qinghua, “2001 nian taiwan dianying shichang” (2001 Taiwan's Film Market) in *2002 Taiwan Cinema Year Book* (Taipei: Guojia dianying ziliao guan, 2002), 41-57.

discusses the film's content: how Chang uses films to preserve a space for continuing discussions about issues in a Taiwanese society that itself has become market-driven—an ongoing trend that *Literary Culture in Taiwan* sketches in its conclusion.<sup>7</sup>

Taiwan's film critics tend to use the term “*mohuan xieshi*” (magical realism) to promote Chang's cinema without bothering to explain what magical realism is.<sup>8</sup> The term was translated into Chinese from English and was first coined in a 1925 study of Expressionist paintings that was written in the Weimar Republic by a German art critic, Franz Roh (1890-1965). He used the term to describe an art form that absorbs forms from everyday reality and uses them in ways that deviate from that reality.<sup>9</sup> This definition was then taken up in Latin America when a group of Latin American writers who studied in Europe became acquainted with the European intellectuals' debates of the era, and introduced Roh's term to contemporaries in their home countries to describe literary art rather than visual arts. The term took root in Latin American countries and was popularized among the literary writers of the region as María-Elena Anguolo and Roy Boland argue in their books.

For example, when Gabriel García Márquez was awarded the 1982 Nobel Prize in literature, his award-winning novel, *One Hundred Year of Solitude* (1967), was translated

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<sup>7</sup> Chang Sung-Sheng, *Literary Culture in Taiwan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 190.

<sup>8</sup> Zheng Binghong, “Zouchu Changlang: Fang Chang Tso-Chi (Walking out of the Corridor: Interview with Chang Tso-Chi).” *Taiwan Dianying Aiyusi* (Taipei: Bookman, 2010): 192; Lee Daw-Ming, *Historical Dictionary of Taiwan Cinema* (Lanham: Sacrecrow 2012): 92; Lin Mucai, “Meili Shiguang: 'Daolu Zhenli Shengming' Yu Chang Tso-Chi Shi Baoli” (the Best of Time: The Way, the Truth, the Life and Chang Tso-Chi's Style of Violence).” Web blog post. *Dianying • Rensheng • Meng*. Blogspot, 6 Feb. 2005. [http://woodlindoc.blogspot.com/2005/02/blog-post\\_6137.html](http://woodlindoc.blogspot.com/2005/02/blog-post_6137.html) (accessed 19 Aug. 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Wendy Faris and Lois Parkison Zamora, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 15.

into different languages and popularly circulated among international readers, including those in the Asian Pacific Rim. The publicity accompanying the popular circulation of this award-winning novel has deprived “magic(al) realism” of its original context, but it also made it a placeholder term that lost the revolutionary overtones that it had in the context of Latin American literary movements. It has become a convenient and descriptive way to promote Asian cultural products among western audience groups, as “Magical Realism and the Search for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki” and “A Still Life of the Wildest Things.”<sup>10</sup> Both authors look at the two Asian societies represented in the selected novels and films because they see these texts as purportedly highlighting aesthetic techniques to evoke their audiences' reception. However, how aesthetic representations are supposed to evoke similar responses in different audiences is unclear, especially if two different cultural mediums, novel and film, are implicated.

Nonetheless, “magical realism” remains a good marketing tool in Asian Pacific Rim societies; it can be used to promote films like Chang's as something more international, more edgy, and less familiar than traditional genre films. The abuse of this term by critics in and outside of academic circles often causes great confusion, obscuring our understanding of the popular reception for Chang's films. I am hesitant to begin my discussion about the techniques of magical realism in Chang's films, because such a discussion, focused around an essentially marketing term, easily takes our focus away from Chang's cinema. Despite the fact that some scholars boycott the use of this term to

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<sup>10</sup> Eddie Bertozzi, "A Still Life of the Wildest Things: Magic(Al) Realism in Contemporary Chinese Cinema and the Reconfiguration of the Jishizhuyi Style," 158. Matthew Strecher, "Magical Realism and the Search for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki," 281.

resist the ambiguities generated by this indefinable and borrowed term, their autonomous boycott does not prevent this term from receiving popular recognition. Now in Asia, this label is even being used to promote cultural products produced in an original Asian context to young audiences from the same place.<sup>11</sup> Taking up the term seriously, therefore, runs against many different kinds of senses and helps to reify marketing strategies as true descriptions of aesthetic styles of genres.

New international scholarship on the term is not helping this situation. As Wendy Faris and Lois Zamora propose in their anthology of magical realism with discussions of literatures ranging from Latin American to Moroccan to Japanese contexts, the popular reception of the term has allowed readers to conceive of an aesthetic movement with international scope that crosses borders. But no matter what such scholars claim, the texts in question do not comply: readers who are fond of what magical realism connotes—magical elements occurring in an otherwise mundane environment—would be unlikely to reach an agreement on its definition because the mode of its transmission and the representative works belonging to that “movement” vary from region to region. In practice, then, such international discussions about magical realism easily become a collective act of scholars talking past each other. Thus, I believe that understanding Chang’s cinema in terms of magical realism would produce more confusion than a clear understanding of its significance. I will look not at how his film was described in its international marketing, but rather at Chang in the act of filmmaking.

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<sup>11</sup> See Strecher (1999) for his analysis of magical realism in Murakami Haruki’s fiction, which continues to remain popular among Japanese readers between the ages of 20 and 30.

In this chapter, I will focus on one of Chang's films, *The Best of Times* (2001), whose popular reception in Taiwan has indeed hinted at the existence of a new aesthetic form established by a group of recent films (regardless of whether that form can or should be called magical realism). These films have been received with great popularity among the audience members of the Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival (TGHFF), but they have had lukewarm successes in Taiwan's theater releases. The films most often included in the list with *The Best of Times* are *Love Letter* (1995), *All About Lily Chou* (2001), *Turn Left, Turn Right* (2003), *The Shoe Fairy* (2005), *Secret* (2007), and so on. Significantly, they also received popular acclaim in the countries/economies where they were produced, a group comprising Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. Their pan-Asian popular reception suggested that there was an emerging type of film aesthetic originating within East Asia that also travels within the region. As we shall see below, how these films have traveled and been marketed for popular reception is certainly unique and has to be closely examined in different contexts. For the present, however, I will contextualize only *The Best of Times* to trace how it is based in the cinematic tradition of New Taiwanese Cinema (*Taiwan xindianying*), rather than simply claiming a relatively undefined international aesthetic in order to address the popular reception of *The Best* in Taiwan.

This does not mean that I will completely ignore how the catchy term from international high culture —magical realism—has been used as a trick to promote Chang's cinema in Taiwan. Instead, I will address the term as it was used to promote Chang's cinema. As we shall see, the term “magical realism” had been spread through

East Asia to popularize a specific group of films conforming to the transmission of cultural products within East Asia—an ongoing trend that *Recentering Globalization* has sketched.<sup>12</sup>

Starting from Chang's intentional subversion of the realism that he methodically constructs in the film world towards the end of the film *The Best of Times* (2001), I contend that this subversion causes audiences to entertain second thoughts about their own realities, if not merely to address their confusion and to ponder over a narrative space that both sustains and transcends New Taiwanese Cinema's cinematic realism at the same time. That is, what scholars have considered an international trend in East Asian cinema (the use of "magic realism") is in Chang's work actually evidence of a consciously local evolution within the tradition of New Taiwanese Cinema, which aims to grow a popular audience with more critical views of what cinema can do.

### **A Cinema of Realism**

"Magic" (*Mohuan*) and "realism" (*xieshi*) have always been two important elements in Chang's cinema, when viewed in a historical context. Chang Tso-chi does not randomly use the term while promoting his films in order to garner faint praise internationally. One must not overlook that his filmmaking remains solidly grounded in the practices associated with realism in film and that the practice of realism has historically been in the field of Taiwan's film productions since the 1960s. When the leading state-owned studio, the Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC),

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<sup>12</sup> Koichi Iwabuchi, *Recentering Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 20.

implemented policy initiating a cinema of realism, Gong Hung (aka Henry Kung), the general manager of the CMPC, declared that its development would follow the spirit of Italian Neorealism (1944-1952), focusing on the man in the street.<sup>13</sup> But to respond to the government's favored ideologies, Gong also had to contrast Taiwan's cinematic realism with Italy's by stressing that the local new cinema's pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty—a “healthy” realism—dispel the speculation that he intended to start a cinema of communism.<sup>14</sup>

In a workshop reviewing this cinema three decades later, film workers who had been part of this cinema expressed their initial doubts about this cinema's claims of being close to representing real situations.<sup>15</sup> As they recalled, the lighting and shooting of scenes were deliberately arranged, and so the films made in Taiwan failed to live up to the claims made by their European sources, despite adopting corresponding language to speak of them. They simply failed to meet this cinema's requirements of being close to the real situation.

Instead, this Taiwanese cinema of realism actually embraced elements that were characteristic of mainstream commercial films, including casting star actors/actresses in the leading roles, offering a complete story structure with conflicts resolved in the

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<sup>13</sup> Zhang Jingpei, *Gong Hong: Zhongying shinian ji tuwen ziliao huibian* [*Gong Hong: A Compilation of Pictures and Data Working in the Central Motion Picture Corporation*], (Taipei: Guojia Dianying Ziliaoguan, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Gong Hong, “Huigu Jiankang Xieshi Luxian” (Reminiscence of Healthy Realism), *Dianying Xinshang* 12.6 (1994): 24.

<sup>15</sup> Yu Chanqu et al, “Shidai de duanzhang—‘yijiu liuling niandai Taiwan dianying jiankang xieshi yingpian hanyi’ zuotanhui” (A Workshop on the Meaning of the 1960 Healthy Realism Films), *Dianying Xinshang* 12.6 (1994):14-23.

conclusion, and following clear plotlines.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the life of the working class in rural villages is the major theme of this cinema, as many of the iconic films of Italian Neorealism were. However, in the Taiwanese variant, shooting often took place in the studio where props had to be consciously weathered and battered to give them a shabby appearance in order to look like the scene was shot on location. This cinema of realism thus converted what the external world presents into an idealized form—a beautification of reality—within the film world of the studio. With support from the government and the execution of this practice by the leading state-owned studio, Healthy Realism Cinema (*Jiankang xieshi dianying*) became one of the commercial cinemas of 1960s Taiwan and gave rise to various popular genre films in the following decades.<sup>17</sup>

The rise of New Taiwanese Cinema in the 1980s is due to a group of innovative filmmakers who resisted this beautified realism, which was initially promoted by officials but later became prevalent in Taiwanese film culture. These young filmmakers, mostly in their early thirties, often met to exchange ideas about filmmaking.<sup>18</sup> Correspondence among these filmmakers suggests a milieu of conscious resistance to the dominant local film culture and a collective goal of winning awards at international film festivals.<sup>19</sup> It is in this milieu of resistance prevalent in Taiwan's film production arena in the 1980s where Chang began his film experience.

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<sup>16</sup> Liao Jinfeng, "Maixiang 'jiankang xieshi dianying' de dingyi—Taiwan dianyingshi de yifen beiwanglu," *Dianying Xinshang* 12.6 (1994): 38-47.

<sup>17</sup> Zhang Jingpei, *Gong Hong de shierge gushi*, n.d. <http://www.ctfa.org.tw/henryk/> (accessed 5 Feb. 2015)

<sup>18</sup> Michael Berry, "Hou Hsiao-hsien with Chu T'ien-wen: Words and Images," *Speaking in Images* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 234-271.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Yang, "Yangdechang iizi bali" (A Letter from Edward Yang Sent from Paris), *Zhengshanmei* 128 (1984): 51.

Their subversion of conventions and norm-bound practices does not mean that they abandoned the traditional practice of cinematic techniques—they were not seeking to invent an *auteur* cinema that shows off directors’ individual styles of filmmaking. Rather, their intent to subvert required a cinema that would be watched, and so the situation led them to ponder over the tradition of realism initiated in the early 1960s, a meditation that became conventional for their generation.<sup>20</sup> Due to the different traditions of Taiwanese film culture, these young directors rarely discussed philosophical questions such as what realism is, what cinema is, what a cinema of realism is, and the like, as directors of the French New Wave did in their interviews or writings. Instead, when asked about their reasons for using unprofessional actors found on the street, longer time span shots, and non-plot driven narrative forms, their answers revealed that the first generation of New Taiwanese Cinema directors had begun to consciously or unconsciously ponder over these questions.<sup>21</sup>

These essential questions are old hat in European aesthetic debates, with discussions provided in essays and books often the required texts that students in film-related studies are assigned to read; these debates created a film culture comprising filmmakers, critics, scholars, and educated audiences who shared a certain model of what film is supposed to do. Ideas that touched upon the ontology of cinema and discussions about these ideas first became possible in Taiwan’s film production arena only when locally trained filmmakers worked with writers or those who studied in film-related areas

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<sup>20</sup> “Taiwan de chengshou” [Taiwan Comes of Age], *Taiwan xindianying* (Taipei: Shibao, 1988), 413-18.

<sup>21</sup> Xiao Ye. *Fangunba, Taiwan Dianying* (Hong Kong: Yangguang weishi, 2011): 6-7.

overseas—though a small group—for film production. They thus came to the debates understanding that answers to these essential questions are not easy. This group of young filmmakers began to grapple with the concept of realism and put into practice their understanding of realism in filmmaking as their means to subvert traditional realism from Taiwanese cinema—they *redefined* local film conventions rather than leaving them behind. To make this point publicly, they followed European practice and even published a manifesto to declare their collective goal of making “another cinema” (*lingyizhong dianying*) to cultivate a film culture that would allow Taiwanese audiences to understand film as art and that would represent Taiwan to film audiences at international film festivals.<sup>22</sup>

Chang Tso-chi’s pursuit of a cinema of realism is framed in a way that is typical for this generation. In one sense, his gesture pays tribute to his predecessors, as he candidly expresses in his interviews and continues cultivating “another cinema” within this tradition of cinematic realism in Taiwanese cinema. The result creates a new path forward. With so many of the first generation New Taiwanese Cinema directors receiving support from the leading state-owned studio to complete their first films, they hoped they could subvert the conventions of official beautified realism. They began to tell their

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<sup>22</sup> Zhang Hongzhi et al, “Mingguo qishiliu nian Taiwan dianying duli xuanyan—gei lingyizhong dianying yige cunzai de kongjian” [The mission Statement of New Taiwanese Cinema in the Seventy-Sixth Year of the Republic of China: Give Another Cinema Space to Live], *Lianhebao* (24 Jan. 1987): 8.

personal stories on the screen and to make films adapted from literary writings or bestsellers.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, they were not necessarily successful. Their films could not sustain sufficient popular reception in the local film market. These films had moments of popularity, but ultimately, these young directors were unable to produce a new kind of commercial film to sustain their circulation and popular reception in the local film market. One cause was straightforward: they lacked the domestic support of distribution networks. Yet, in another sense, that was not problematic for the filmmakers themselves, since these directors never intended to make profit-driven films. As their manifesto indicates, they had simply thought their projects through to the point where they set their goal to be making “another cinema,” which is different from taking on profit-driven motives.

A popular critic published a sensational article accusing these young directors of being narcissistic because the domestic reception of their films and the box office results had been poor.<sup>24</sup> A response article was published in a film magazine to counter-balance such a sensational accusation, but it was unable to reach a wider readership than the sensational article did.<sup>25</sup> Such an accusation created a critical mass opinion at home that crystalized a hostile attitude toward the first generation of New Taiwanese Cinema’s

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<sup>23</sup> Xiong Yixi, “Wunianzhan: zhaodao xianzhi, zhaodao ziyou” (Wu Nien-ju: Locating the Restrictions, Find the Freedom), *Tienxia* (9 July 2014). <http://www.cw.com.tw/article/article.action?id=5059655> (accessed 5 Feb. 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Du Yunzhi, “Qing uyao ‘wanwan’ guopian” [Please Don’t Terminate Our National Cinema], *Mingshengbao* (29 Aug. 1985): 19.

<sup>25</sup> “‘Xin’ daoyan dou gufang zishang ma?” [Are New Cinema Directors All Narcissistic?], *Zhenshanmei* 128 (1984): n.p.

directors. The accusation further reveals how the mechanism involved in turning films into box office hits had been ignored in Taiwan's film production arena and underscores the necessity for a more comprehensive understanding of Taiwan's film industry that will help to outline a model for sustainable film production in Taiwan.<sup>26</sup>

With the rise of civil consciousness during the 1980s, the situation changed: various social forces drew attention to the party-state government and to resource allocations for state-owned agencies, while also calling for the examination of what kind of film production they should fund.<sup>27</sup> The leading state-owned studio was able to fund new cinema productions, but it was ultimately unable to promote this new cinema as widely and overtly as it had promoted Healthy Realism Cinema decades ago. Thus, its new generation of investment has not necessarily yielded public knowledge of this new generation's work within Taiwanese film traditions.<sup>28</sup> As the financial situation of the CMPC deteriorated, the state's ways of supporting this generation of young filmmakers seemed to meander and lose focus. Directors of this new cinema and their productions were easily ignored in a local film market filled with profit-driven films and theaters.

As a consequence, these filmmakers took marketing and finance into their own hands and began to regularly attend international film festivals, thus learning how to open up a market outside of Taiwan. Despite other cutbacks, the state-owned agencies often offered financial support and other ancillary resources to assist these directors and their teams, enabling them to attend film festivals, especially when their films were nominated

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<sup>26</sup> Liang Liang, "Jiuling niandai Taiwan dianying de zhange," *Dianying yishu* 4 (2001): 103-106.

<sup>27</sup> Peggy Chiao et al, *Taiwan Xindianying* [New Taiwanese Cinema], (Taipei: Shibao, 1988): 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

for awards.<sup>29</sup> Since the 1980s, this generation of young directors, also known as the directors of New Taiwanese Cinema, has made Taiwan known among audiences at international film festivals for its distinct cinema of realism.<sup>30</sup> These directors were often recognized as *auteurs* of international cinema when their films premiered at film festivals in the west, mostly in France, Italy, and North America.<sup>31</sup> Their nominations for awards in these western film festivals also garnered media attention at home and in the region, which bolstered distribution. Second-tier, regional, and local film festivals then began to compete to screen these films. Audiences that New Taiwanese Cinema directors had built up on the film festival circuit now formed a market that Chang could continue to cultivate—the traditions of filmmaking in Taiwan had been extended and transformed by the filmmakers' attention both to the distinctive traditions of Taiwan film and to marketing.

Nonetheless, Chang could not simply rely on the film festival circuit to continue his career as a film director; he also had to build on the work that his immediate predecessors had done. The first-tier, mostly western, international film festivals had grown to become increasingly globalized and competitive since the 1980s. The result was new criteria for selectivity. Given that the festival curators shared the overriding ambition of presenting a quasi-world cinema, they (un)consciously adopted a particular pragmatic logic into their programming agenda that had begun to work against any

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<sup>29</sup> “Dianying dashiji 1980~1989” [Chronicles of Taiwanese Cinema 1980~1989], *Taiwan dianying shuwei diancang ziliaoku*, n.d. <http://www.ctfa.org.tw/history/index.php?id=1099> (accessed 6 Feb. 2015)

<sup>30</sup> “Fulu: qita wenhua dui Taiwan xindianying de kanfa” [Appendix], *Taiwan Xindianying* [New Taiwanese Cinema], (Taipei: Shibao, 1988): 400-420.

<sup>31</sup> Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh and Darrell William Davis, *Taiwan Film Directors: A Treasure Island* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 6-9.

*auteur*-driven aesthetic in smaller countries.<sup>32</sup> The results have been devastating, particularly for small markets: for instance, they felt that one director from a small film market like Taiwan would be enough representation on a schedule that was trying to present a purportedly global vision of cinema, no matter how vibrant such a local cinema culture seemed domestically.<sup>33</sup>

This pragmatic logic affected Taiwan cinema. For example, it underlined the stardom of figures like Hou Hsiao-hsien, the first Taiwanese director who achieved stardom and established a solid film career on the circuit of international film festivals. Hou has demonstrated the ideal model for a filmmaker who sustains his film career in this way. The leading film festivals do indeed open space to introduce to western audiences talented filmmakers from different regions of the world, but their ultimate goal is to sustain their own local film industries, through diverse cultural and capital exchanges that create publicity. Nonetheless, the space opened by these film festivals for outsiders—those who are not from the local industry—is limited, which, in turn, limits the impact of such publicity on the financial stability of the chosen filmmakers' home film industries. It would be difficult, for instance, to expect the investments that Hou Hisao-hsien draws for his film productions from Taiwanese sources to be matched by the allocation to his contemporaries, other first-generation directors of New Taiwanese Cinema. Even though they also develop the unique cinema in which Hou's work developed and continue to tackle philosophical issues of filmmaking, their international

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<sup>32</sup> James Tweedie, "Edward Yang and Taiwan's Age of Auteurs," in *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Cinemas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 422.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 423.

visibility remained restricted, as does the support available through international distribution.<sup>34</sup>

Attending film festivals had thus become a catch-22 for Chang because of the limited positions that Taiwanese directors have had within them. In one sense, Chang Tso-chi had to learn how to sustain the practice of cinematic realism that the first generation directors of New Taiwanese Cinema had established.<sup>35</sup> It had become a particular style known to a domestic segment of the public and one that film festival audiences expected from Taiwanese films. This led the second generation of New Taiwanese Cinema filmmakers like Chang to a necessary decision: to continue get into the major film festivals, with their traditional limits on the number of directors of films made in languages other than English, he could not simply develop a unique cinematic signature style and use it as the basis for his professional reputation; he could not market himself as an *auteur* like Hou because he would not reap the same visibility and funding that the older director had. Instead, he also needed to show that he knew conventional film production and that he could work within idioms that developed out of the “normal” style, but not necessarily in an idiosyncratic idiom either. That is, he needed to develop a viewership outside of the international art film circuit if he was to continue his work; he needed to find *commercial* money outside the prestigious circuits that would be reluctant to market more than a few filmmakers from the Asian/Chinese market areas.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 421-424.

<sup>35</sup> Wu Chia-chi, “Festival, Criticism and International Reputation of Taiwan New Cinema,” in *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity and State of the Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 75-92.

Chang has adopted a simple strategy for coping with these limitations. Most critically, he now still attends film festivals that are interested in Taiwanese films because of the popular reception of New Taiwanese Cinema films in the western film festival circuit. A major distinction is that he turned to these regional film festivals as the most affordable steppingstone to international competition, and he did indeed manage to establish his reputation first at international film festivals in Busan, South Korea and Tokyo, Japan.<sup>36</sup>

At first glance, then, Chang's road to prestige seems similar to that his precursors took. They also needed to establish their reputations at international film festivals before they were able to attract attention from local film production companies and from curators of film festivals, critics, and scholars, etc. A closer examination of the paths they took to establish their reputations, however, actually reveals a drastic difference in Taiwanese audiences' reception of their films and a considerably different strategy for the filmmaker.

One must remember that the rise of New Taiwanese Cinema at the Europe-based film festivals corresponded to the timing of the establishment of film studies in Taiwan as an academic discipline introduced from the west, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom.<sup>37</sup> The works of directors who collect awards from first-tier film festivals, especially Cannes, Berlin, and Venice, correspond more closely to western

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<sup>36</sup> Lee Dao-ming, *Historical Dictionary of Taiwan Cinema* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 91-94.

<sup>37</sup> "Links—Academic Institute," *Taiwan Cinema*, n. d. [http://www.taiwancinema.com/lp\\_152](http://www.taiwancinema.com/lp_152) (accessed 9 Feb. 2015).

filmmaking norms and thus are more easily studied from an academic perspective.<sup>38</sup> These award-winning films appear to resemble western films more than other films from their countries of origins. Studies about these directors and their films also establish Taiwanese audiences' perception of art cinema, which are often simplified, with those films referred to as "good" in widely circulated news articles and accompanied by endorsements from academic and film festival institutions.<sup>39</sup> This loose equivalency between art film and "good" film did not cause too much dissonance when these films were circulated among elite audience groups whose perception of film is highly colored by their viewing habits and by film festival rosters.

However, when more diverse audiences from all walks of life encounter art films, these "art films" often do not register as "good" films, as the mass audience has different and often more diverse backgrounds than festival audiences. Art films often contradict mass audiences' viewing experience, which was established through their consumption of mainstream cinema rather than institutional critiques. This has always been the situation with the demographics of Taiwan's film audience. Taiwan's market for art cinema is so small—yet at the same time diverse—that it is unlikely to sustain its production if it simply relied on the local market and on an audience accustomed to reading films differently. The solution the first generation of New Taiwanese Cinema directors came up with was to open up to an overseas market, comprising Europe-based film festival circuits, and to continue cultivating the small group within local film audiences who is

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<sup>38</sup> "Bianzhe jianjie"(editorial board), *Xilian rensheng: Hou Hsiao-hsien dianying yanjiu* (Taipei: Maitian, 2000), n.p.

<sup>39</sup> Peng Hsiao-yen, "Auteurism and Taiwan New Cinema," *Journal of Theater Studies* 9 (2012): 125-148.

interested in international art cinema. Chang Tso-chi continued to face a similar challenge in Taiwan's release system when he tried to establish his reputation as a second-generation film festival circuit director.

At this point, one must stress that film festivals have significant impacts today. East Asian societies began regularly holding film festivals in the 1980s so that their domestic film productions could receive public screenings in their home countries and in the region. These film festivals screenings also help local audiences learn the criteria associated with "quality" films and help promote local production.<sup>40</sup> But with that in mind, Chang's cinema became a showcase of how award-winning films encompassing aesthetic achievements could also be closely related to the local audience's life experiences.<sup>41</sup> Since the establishment of the Audience Award in TGHFF in 1997, audiences have been able to vote for their favorite film from a list of films nominated for

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<sup>40</sup> Japan started the Tokyo International Film Festival in 1985. South Korea's Busan International Film Festival began in 1996. Taiwan's Golden Horse Awards was established in 1962 and aimed to foster Chinese/Sinophone film production industries in Taiwan. However, because of political turmoil (the Cold War, the Chinese Civil War, and Taiwan's martial law period), the Golden Horse Awards did not become an international film festival including competition and non-competition screenings until 1990. It took Taiwan's government more than a decade to make it into an international film festival and to foster local-Taiwanese, not Hong Kongese—film productions. During my interview with an officer who is in charge of film screenings at the Taipei Film Archive and through reading directors' interviews, I have come to realize that Taiwan does not have a supporting distribution system for local productions. Theater owners or multiplex theaters (often associated with the global Hollywood industry) are not willing to secure screenings (number of screens or days) for local film productions because they could make more money screening films that come with abundant advertisement budgets. There is no policy mandating that these theater owners help sustain the local film industry. As a result, local film productions are often unable to gain public screenings in the local theaters. Even if they do reach to the screens, theater owners can pull them off the screen if they are unable to sell enough tickets during the first weekend of their initial release. This has devastated Taiwanese film directors since the 1990s. In this sense, the attempt by central and city governments to help organize local film festivals beginning in the 2000s is intended to counter Hollywood's saturation and to help local filmmakers garner Taiwanese audiences' attention to local products. *Taiwan Cinema Year Book*, a series publication sponsored by the Executive Yuan, reports a boom in the number of local film festivals from the late 1990s to the early 2000s.

<sup>41</sup> "Guanzhong piaoxuan zuijia yingpian" [Audience Award], Lijie Ziliao, *Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival*, n. d. <http://www.goldenhorse.org.tw/ui/index.php> (accessed 9 Feb. 2015).

the best picture competition. Chang's films are often selected for the Audience Awards.<sup>42</sup> Compared to his predecessors who achieved their prominence among the circuit of western-based international film festivals, then, the reputation that Chang establishes in Busan, South Korea and Tokyo, Japan, argues that he has won favor with more local film audiences and has managed to make “good” films on trends associated with the region and in cinematic styles familiar to regional audiences.<sup>43</sup> Newspaper articles and film audience reviews of his films demonstrate how the popular reception of *The Best of Times* draws on the audience's encounters with Japanese and Korean popular cultural products in daily life.<sup>44</sup> His strategic approach to promoting the reception of his films in regional international film festivals leads him to answer to his audiences' encounters with popular culture and daily life. In an interview, he states that this conscious decision to address the audience's way of life is a compromise he has to make in order to continue filmmaking and is his response to the demographics of the film audience in the region—which is a small market, but still a market nonetheless.<sup>45</sup>

A second ongoing trend also has affected Taiwan's film industry over the long term: Japanese cultural products saturate Taiwan's market, with its peak during post

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> I use “trends” rather than “genre” because genre in the Taiwanese context is a term that connotes Hollywood movies. Taiwanese cinema (as well as many East Asian cinemas) is less-genre oriented. Every East Asian cinema represents certain popular trends within the region. For example, Hong Kong is known for police/gang films, China for costumed/big budget films, Japan for horror and psychologically creepy films, and Taiwan for films that warm your heart, etc.

<sup>44</sup> Wang Yalan, “‘Meili shiguang’ haibaore piaofang yere” [The Poster of *The Best of Times* is Popular. So are Its Box Office], *Mingshengbao* (Sep. 23 2002): n. p. Enci, “bianyuan qingchun de huahuo—tan Chang Tso-chi's films” [Youthful Sparkles from the Edge—Talking about Chang Tso-chi's Films], Web blog post. *PChome* (13 Jan. 2014) <http://mypaper.pchome.com.tw/enci37/post/1234978577> (accessed 9 Feb. 2015).

<sup>45</sup> Lee Jialing et al, “Dianying yi bushi name chunle” [Film is not so pure any more], *Dangdai* 71 (2003): 84-89.

martial law Taiwan (the 1990s), accompanied by a boom of studies on this cultural trend in the early 2000s.<sup>46</sup> The demographics of these consumers are complex and thus difficult to define. Scholars commonly observe that this group mainly consists of a generation of Taiwanese young adults who were mostly born after the 1980s.<sup>47</sup> As Koichi Iwabuchi lauds, Japanese popular culture in Taiwan is part of a regional trend in East Asia that has to be contextualized within global capitalism—a regionalization, in the form of Japanization.<sup>48</sup> He further specifies that the international success of Japanese cultural products in the region is due to a “culturally odorless” promotion (a non-specific market promotion) that creates a seemingly borderless demand, which appeals to local consumers and facilitates dissemination.<sup>49</sup>

This promotion strategy is best understood through the lens of the concept of “cultural proximity” that Joseph Straubhaar delineates.<sup>50</sup> Despite the fact that western films—European (art) films and American Hollywood films—dominate Taiwan’s film market, including in theater releases and at local film festivals, Japanese audiovisual products permeate Taiwanese people’s lives: the convenience store carries Japanese products; stores are named in the Japanese style; and daily greetings, food, names of commercial districts, etc. have all been Japanified. This context for the reception of

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<sup>46</sup> Chi Hengchang, “‘hari’ yu dushikongjian de wenhua yanjiu—‘harizhichang’ xinmending” [Cultural Studies of “Hari” and Urban Space: A Case Study of Ximending, a “Hari City”], *Wenhua yanjiu yuebao* 14 (2002): n. p. (accessed 10 Feb. 2015)

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Koichi Iwabuchi, “Introduction: The 1990s—Japan returns to Asia in the age of globalization,” *Recentring Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 1-22.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph Straubhaar, “Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity,” *Cultural Studies in Mass Communication* 8 (1): 39-59.

Japanese products was important in shaping the demographics of the mass film audience to which Chang appeals.

### **The Employment of “Magical” Elements**

The financial and cultural situation just outlined reflects a special case represented by the new cinema from Taiwan: New Taiwanese Cinema began in state-owned studios, and its development continues to depend on financial assistance from the Government Information Office.<sup>51</sup> However, this model is limited, and thus, how to engage the local audience with local productions presents the greatest challenge.<sup>52</sup> From the other side, although these domestic productions are culturally relevant for the local audience, the local release companies still prefer international commercial imports over local productions.<sup>53</sup> This profit-driven release strategy had dominated for almost two decades, and thus the New Taiwanese Cinema and many local productions were pressured to find other ways to release their productions so that they could continue making films. As outlined above, the first generation of New Taiwanese Cinema directors survived by successfully introducing their films—known as a cinema of realism—to western film festival audiences. As Taiwan’s release mechanisms remained unfriendly to local productions, it is no surprise that Chang meticulously chose to carry on the practice of cinematic realism he inherited from the first generation New Taiwanese Cinema directors

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<sup>51</sup> Lee Daw-ming, *Historical Dictionary of Taiwan Cinema* (Plymouth, UK: Sacrecrow, 2013), 396.

<sup>52</sup> “Yangdechang kangyi Taiwan dianying huanjing: juebu tuoxie de fennu zhongnianren,” *Zhongguowang* (July 7, 2007) [http://big5.china.com.cn/overseas/txt/2007-07/02/content\\_8467328.htm#](http://big5.china.com.cn/overseas/txt/2007-07/02/content_8467328.htm#) (accessed 11 Feb. 2015) .

<sup>53</sup> Feng Shaoen, “‘dianyingfa’ zaishen liwei yu qiangjiu guopian,” *Taiwan xingbao* (23 Mar. 2015) <https://anntw.com/articles/20150323-HyAV> (accessed 25 May 2015) .

so that he could continue to promote his films through the film festival circuit, as his predecessors had.

But his image in the international festival circuit is different from theirs, as he has been known under the rubric of “magic realism,” as noted earlier. An obvious question arises: Why does Chang choose to employ magic elements? Or rather, given what we now know about his film texts, what cinematic practice that is an extension of Taiwanese realism gets *called* “magic realism” by international audiences?<sup>54</sup> What is the meeting point between international and regional film festival audiences that Chang is trying to use to move past the art film audience while simultaneously functioning in the region's Japanified popular culture?

As director Brian De Palma puts it in his documentary on Martin Scorsese, “In any kind of art form, *artists* are creating an illusion for the audience to look at reality through *their* special lie. The camera lies all the time, lies twenty four times per seconds.” Palma here takes up a very common assumption about film: that its production is itself magic (a clear industry reference to early film pioneer George Méliès, as well). This preconception about film does indeed motivate selective filmmakers to view their work as artwork—“making magic”—but such a preconception also restricts the space for discussion on how a filmmaker is responsible to his audience and not only to his creation. If a “good” film is produced by a genius who brings new narrative forms into existence, it needs to be read on his own terms—the presumption that is inherent in discussions on

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<sup>54</sup> Yu Sen-lun, “A language all his own,” *Taipei Times* (17 Aug. 2002): 16. “Chicago International Film Festival: Week Two,” *Reader* (11 Oct. 2002) <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/chicago-international-film-festival/Content?oid=909907> (accessed 11 Feb. 2015) .

*auteur* filmmaking. However, audiences tend to draw on their personal experiences of how films work in order to comprehend “film magic.” Both models for defining what film is (film as a magical creation and film as something read by an audience) are fairly legitimate. However, a problem arises for film projects either when the audience’s personal experience is exaggerated to become the sole arbiter of what is understandable in a film, or when the film claims sole authority over its viewers and demands a particular way of viewing it.

This conception of audience-centered filmmaking had become a dominant concern for Chang, as he sought to tap into a broader model for the funding and distribution of his films. In an open forum with college students from a national college in Taiwan, Chang revealed the funding situation of local film productions and disclosed how he believes that making a “commercial film” (*shangyepian*) has basically become, in the context of Taiwan’s film industry, synonymous with a film director’s intention to treat the audience as central to the process of film production.<sup>55</sup> Some of what he said is clearly branding: his comments about this seemingly simple logistical claim implicitly evades the fact that a film can be categorized as a blockbuster or audience-centered movie only in hindsight.<sup>56</sup> The open forum in which he made these remarks is also significant: it invited college students to consider the increasing interest in the role of audience reception in Taiwan’s film industry and their own roles as a film audience. In this context, Chang’s claim of making films that respect audiences can be read as trying

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<sup>55</sup> Chang Tso-chi, “Chang Tso-chi zhi dianying mantan” [Chang Tso-chi’s Talk about Filmmaking], The Open Education Consortium, National Chiao Tung University, Hsinchu, Taiwan. 23 May 2012.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

to cultivate audiences' ability to make sense of film while simultaneously provoking their interest in it—he is daring them to take a chance. As he sees it, however, a film director—even the most prestigious *auteur* whose purpose is to make films that are classified as artistic achievements—must have a target audience in mind because the act of creating a text necessarily implies communication between the text creator and the text receiver. He is, in this sense, pulling the curtain aside and revealing the truth about international film festivals—that they, too, have a particular set of audience expectations.

Who, then, are the audiences for the second generation New Taiwanese Cinema directors? In addition to the small group of audiences—mostly cinephiles—that the first generation New Taiwanese Cinema directors helped to cultivate and who continue to follow local film productions, Chang also confronts a new generation of young audiences who grew up during post-martial law Taiwan (the 1990s) in a society moving toward late capitalism that was heavily exposed to Japanese popular culture and Hollywood films.<sup>57</sup> Chang realizes that this younger generation of film audiences, mostly college students, missed the rise of New Taiwanese Cinema in the 1980s and the tug of war between this film movement and the political regulation of filmmaking that focused on funding.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> In a personal conversation I had with local film festival curators, they disclosed that their experience with film festivals began in college (mid- to late 1990s). They watched a variety of internationally acclaimed films and continued to observe Taiwan's local film productions, whose premieres often take place at local film festivals today. This conversation took place at the Kaohsiung Film Archive on 28 May 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Lu Feii, "Survey of Movie going Pattern & Film Exhibition Industry in Taiwan: 1980-1999," Ministry of Science and Technology, Center for Humanities Research, 31 July 2000. <http://nccur.lib.nccu.edu.tw/handle/140.119/3609> (accessed 11 Feb. 2015) This is a government funded report (National Science Council, now renamed as Ministry of Science and Techonology) published on the school website where Professor Lu is teaching.

Instead, they grew up in an age when it was possible to make films with many different themes and in various styles.

Ironically, however, Chang's audience was also at an age when the ways of telling stories in film had actually become quite standardized because of the division between domestic studio production companies and the distribution companies that preferred to distribute more profitable international commercial films. Taiwan's film market was saturated with international commercial films. These commercial films, mostly American Hollywood imports, has helped these young audiences form a mainstream stereotype of how a story should be told on film. They expect a film narrative to have one clear storyline, scenes that support this main storyline in what must generally be a plot-driven story with a leading protagonist, and a happy ending that resolves the preceding conflicts and completes the story.<sup>59</sup> They tend to consider films that deviate from these conventions of story-telling to be a story that is audience-unfriendly rather than questioning if such films might be trying to initiate new dialogues or speak to different audiences.

The demographics of Taiwan's film festival audiences thus are important to understanding Chang's projects. I hesitate to propose a standardized classification or definition of the demographics because it can hardly grasp the complexities of reality, but I need to offer a description to situate the complex demographics in a real situation (a description that conforms to the audience that Chang addressed). A majority of people in

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

these young audiences has received higher education.<sup>60</sup> In college, they have had access to a variety of texts—art films, for example—that are preserved, circulated, and discussed in academia. With higher education becoming ubiquitous, part of the audience becomes interested in film culture in new ways. For example, they become interested in international art films, which used to be almost exclusively of interest only to elite communities, such as film festival audiences. Through institutions of higher learning, these audiences thus have been exposed to media that did not exist locally.

However, the new generation of audiences—Taiwanese who were college students in the 1990s and later—enjoyed an upbringing very different from that of the more elite or elitist group of predecessors because they had grown up in a media environment that included Japanese popular culture and more Hollywood films, not only the Taiwanese films made to compete with international art films. They, this new generation is closer to the mass audience for international commercial cinema than for art cinema, even in its Taiwanese form. As a consequence, they thus misread older art films if they simply draw on their experience with mainstream cinema or other popular cultural texts. Here, a distinct split between two generations of film audiences in Taiwan becomes evident. Elite viewers used to be a kind of hereditary aristocracy with political privileges—they came from the leadership classes and were educated among these same kinds of people.<sup>61</sup> In the compulsory education system, they were schooled to fulfill the

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* Cai Minjun. *Taiwan dianying guanzhong de guanshang dongji yu xiaofei xingwei yanjiu* [The Motivation and Behavior of Taiwanese Movie Viewers], MA thesis. National Sun Yat-sen University (Taiwan), 2011.

<sup>61</sup> This observation is drawn from my research on editorial boards, writers, and film reviewers of *Yingxiang*, a film magazine founded in 1971. It was the first film magazine that introduced internationally

social task of producing knowledge in ways that perpetuated dominant forms of cultural capital. The films appreciated by the old elite (supporters of New Taiwanese Cinema) and upheld in academia (especially in film criticism) thus did more than fulfill needs for personal entertainment. Younger generation of audiences needed to become part of this production system of knowledge, and they did so through their own contact with higher education, where they acquired the required literacy needed to “read” New Taiwanese Cinema films appropriately. At the same time, however, they also had relatively easy access to mainstream movies that broadened their horizon and allowed them to become more receptive to films from different countries and traditions. Their film literacy thus was different from that of the earlier generation that had learned to read art films in the context of film festivals and international critiques and not just in movie theaters.

This younger generation's experiences with films must be characterized not only by a relatively broad literacy in terms of their ability to identify the elements of mass-market international films such as star actors and actresses, special sound and visual effects, high definition, twisted plots and stories, etc. Their intuitions also lead them to *ignore* unfamiliar or challenging components of these films—they understand that these international films have national moments but that overall the film overall will remain largely transparent to them. This generation grew up in the post-martial law society, where mainstream cinema—accompanied by its ubiquitous commercial marketing and other advertising—had formed their film-viewing habits. They had seen more

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acclaimed films and the concept of film as art to Taiwanese film audiences. However, the first generation of *Yingxiang* (1971-1979) focuses exclusively on foreign films.

technology-innovated effects in films than those usually represented at film festivals. At the same time, some claim that they were less tolerant of films that presented stumbling blocks to straight-forward readings of the film.

Chang is one of the few directors who has tried to capitalize on this new generation of film audiences by continuing to present to them “another cinema,” a new kind of art cinema that requires its audiences to revisit internationally acclaimed films and New Taiwanese Cinema films and to move beyond them to become a new Taiwanese cinema viewer. As we have seen, there are risks involved in challenging a mainstream audience. Chang’s insistence on continuing the practice of cinematic realism, for instance, does cause audiences to accuse him of making films to upset them. They seem to recognize that he is making films in something closer to film-festival style, but in different ways, for his films are still readable to them. One might say, then, that Chang’s film practice has been successful because his films are so readable to this audience that they can be unnerved by the illusion of reality that his films present. The proof of this claim is strictly objective: his films not only continue to win Audience Awards at the TGHFF, they also achieve moderate success in the local film market.<sup>62</sup> Even these modest box office successes suggest that his films can also appeal to the younger audience whose literacy in film-festival film styles has not yet been fully cultivated

As I argued in the last chapter, Chang not only puts audiences at the center of his filmmaking by catering to their tastes for diversity in mainstream film's narrative styles,

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<sup>62</sup> Zheng Binghong, “Zouchu changlang: fang Chang Tso-chi,” [Walking out of the corridor: an interview with Chang Tso-chi], *Taiwan dianying aiyusi* (Taipei: Shulin, 2010), 188.

he also actively uses their predictable responses to extend their literacy. The way he constructs films exposes them to different film and representation syntaxes and challenges both the linearity of popular cinema and the stylization characteristic of the film festival cinema that wins critics' prizes (not just the audience ones).<sup>63</sup> Particularly, he exploits the tendency of younger audiences, less-schooled in considering film as art, to draw on their personal experiences to understand a film. Film, after all, needs to be *read*; the cinematic world must be seen as distinct from reality.

When Chang creates film sequences that start by exploiting his audience's ability to read commercial film syntaxes but then reveals where these syntaxes fail or are manipulating what is seen and understood, he blurs the boundary between international commercial films and film-festival films. Emotional responses are often evoked in that blurring—empathy helps audiences bridge over the spots that are difficult for them to read cinematically. Some of these responses are probably desirable in a conventional sense. They can lead audiences to experience catharsis about happy endings or tragedies, but there is a fine line between catharsis and distraction or a relatively meaningless happy ending. Film sequences that start conventionally but end up somewhere else—somewhere more disturbing—can distract audiences' attention from the rest of the film, even if they understand what this new kind of exposition is doing to them. Chang recognizes these young audiences' need for catharsis and resolution of plot and character, elements built into the experience of enjoying commercial films. Thus, his challenge is to

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<sup>63</sup> “Yangdechang kangyi Taiwan dianying huanjing: juebu tuoxie de fennu zhongnianren,” *Zhongguowang* (July 7, 2007) [http://big5.china.com.cn/overseas/txt/2007-07/02/content\\_8467328.htm#](http://big5.china.com.cn/overseas/txt/2007-07/02/content_8467328.htm#) (accessed 11 Feb. 2015).

balance catharsis-inducing elements in his film narrative and more intellectually challenging story elements that lead them to ponder what the seeming realism of conventional narratives actually means. He recognizes that he needs to garner the younger audiences' attention to help them acquire a broader literacy, the kind of film-reading ability that has been associated with international film criticism and higher education in society. Only if he can bridge that gap can the conversation between a film director and an audience begin again. This way, audiences can also be counted on to look for and to be willing to decode unfamiliar components in his films instead of avoiding them.

The result, I contend, is a set of films with which Chang begins a new conversation with Taiwan's film audiences, particularly the younger generation, making film into an active social text. He challenges his audiences with a more complex realism, which gets branded by international critics as *magic realism*. It does, after all, go beyond the more conventional realism familiar to older Taiwanese audiences, but it is not experimental film. The critics who use this term thus see the two faces of his filmmaking: it is both realistic and challenging of the assumptions about realistic representation. Chang's use of "magic" elements (as critics designate them) has to be understood in this context in order to better understand what is meant by the magic and realism that critics attribute to *The Best of Times*, which—as noted above—by no means uses stylistic elements from Latin American magic realism but does wed a critique of realist representation to a critique of society, as that literary tradition does.

*The Best* drew international financing from the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation and was co-produced by Chang Tso-chi's film studio. They relied on the fact that Chang's first two films had attracted some attention from local film critics and audiences after their successes in international film festivals in Busan and Tokyo. Yet, not until the successes *The Best of Times* at the TGHFF did Chang's reputation become firmly established among local audiences. This is the film that wedded popular and film-festival strategies for filmmaking in particularly compelling ways. The film's nominations for multiple awards and the two special awards—the Jury's Pick and the Audience Award—it collects at the TGHFF reveal the convergence of jurors' criteria in examining a quality film and the audience's reception of its favorite film.<sup>64</sup> The last chapter had shown how Chang Tso-chi brought fresh filmic techniques into conventional stories. The next sections of this present chapter will complement that exposition by showing how he extends his narrative strategies to bring fresh surprises to the telling of a familiar story in *The Best*.

### ***The Best of Times* (2002)**

*The Best of Times* is, at first glance, a very conventional story about two high school graduates whose summer adventures become misadventures. Wei and Jie are good friends who grow up in the same neighborhood, one where different Taiwanese ethnic groups co-reside. Wei is from a Taiwanese Hakka family who speaks Hakka, one of the

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<sup>64</sup> "Guanzhong piaoxuan zuijia yingpian" [Audience Award], Lijie Ziliao, *Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival*, n. d. <http://www.goldenhorse.org.tw/ui/index.php> (accessed 9 Feb. 2015).

major Chinese language dialects. That family's story is tragic, as a popular film aimed at audience catharsis would insist. His mother died of leukemia when he was little, and his father never stopped mourning her death. His twin sister, Min, is also dying of leukemia, and the film opens after she recently returned home to live out the final months of her life. The setup for the film story now becomes more complex: Jie's father is a former soldier in the Kuomintang (Nationalist) army who was forced into exile on Taiwan when the Chinese Communist Party came to power in Mainland China in 1949. He remains bitter about his past, even after Jie's mother had run away and abandoned the family. The family drama is altered here to include a distinct social-historical element, pulling it beyond a formula Hollywood plot. Whereas the father in mainstream cinema would ultimately step up and assume the parenting role of the absent mother, the father figures in *The Best* do not. They are not able to overcome the grudges about the adversity encountered in their lives and thus spend all their time drinking and gambling, essentially leaving their sons alone emotionally as they deal with their own issues.

The film does not become a story about this social problem, however. Despite his problematic situation, Wei notes in his voiceover that he considers himself to be an easygoing and down-to-earth person, in contrast to Jie, a dreamer who is obsessed with magic and is always eager to show off his modest talents as a conjurer. Wei sees in Jie's obsession his hope to change his unfortunate lot in life. Jie's story, unfortunately, does not have a happy ending: he actually finds his runaway mother when he is a junior in high school and asks on Mother's Day to live with her, but she immediately brings him

back to his father and leaves again. This family has no happy ending, in the sense that a family reunion would be a happy ending.

But there *is* a different, more challenging catharsis built into this film. Unlike Jie, Wei has a job working as a parking valet at a nightclub owned by a gang. His reliable performance at work leads to his getting both Jie and himself more responsible (if not more respectable) jobs as debt collectors for the gang. Their performance earns them the reputation of being good at this “work.” When their supervisor rewards them with an unloaded gun and a bullet to expedite their debt-collecting process, they at first enjoy the power that comes with having the weapon, but they soon suffer from the damage it causes. Jie uses the gun to kill the head of a rival gang and thereby initiates a cycle of revenge, which eventually proves deadly for both of them. What starts as the story of two friends, each of whom has his own tragic family situation, ends as something infinitely more cruel and emotional.

If the plot moves cautiously beyond Hollywood, the cinematic story-telling becomes bolder. Chang Tso-chi builds a complex narrative strategy around these dual protagonists who are good friends from the same neighborhood and inseparable companions in this story of a “summer adventure” that turns into the ultimate misadventure for both of them. Wei’s voiceover reveals a sensitive, loyal friend, not a child from a bad neighborhood doomed to failure. His voiceover not only explains Jie’s obsession with magic but also reveals his relationship with Jie. Wei, though a Bruce Lee fan, displays a practical and realistic character; Jie exudes a volatile and mercurial appeal, an energetic and interesting presence in this limited world. Chang makes them

counterparts in this film to ground this summer adventure story in a down-to-earth narrative set in a historical reality, disclosing Taiwan's stresses as a society of compressed modernity.

The camera works to bring these two dimensions of the film together as well. Here, the voiceover creates a sympathetic character, while the camera opening is more realistic and harsher. The opening sequence has the camera turning like a surveillance camera, panning on a pivot point that seems to establish its viewpoint as an objective observer, surveying what everyone would see if they went to this neighborhood. When the film fades from a solid black screen into that first scene, the camera angle is explicitly marked in a specific way: it stands in a corner of the house oriented at a 45-degree angle toward the front door. After 12 seconds, it turns left, allowing the audience a glance at the interior of the house. It stops for a moment when it reaches the other end of the house and then reverses its movement, returning to its opening position. That repeated pan, mimicking the realistic movement of a surveillance camera, establishes a very fraught, split reality with very little cinematic manipulation. Chang does not use a montage, as commercial cinema might have done; he instead insists on using a camera that is in its own way “really present” in the scene that it is filming.

The first part of this camera's movement shows a domestic scene: a cozy living room with a fish tank set at the entrance. The wall against which the fish tank is set is pierced through by a window leading into Min's bedroom. Wei's grandma enters the house, walks past the camera, and asks Dudu, Wei's younger sister, to help prepare the feast for the festival. Wei is playing with his martial arts weapon (*nunchaku*) in his room,

and his grandmother walks to his door complaining that he never stops playing with his “toy” even when everyone else is busy preparing for the festival. Shortly after, he puts aside his toy, speaks politely to his grandmother, and follows her instructions to find the 8-God banner on her bed. She always hangs the banner up on the front door for the Dragon Boat Festival celebration. Min, wearing a mask, enters the living room and sits in front of the fish tank, observing the movements of the swimming fish. She isn’t left alone for long. Soon, Jie enters the house to speak to her. He tries to amuse her by showing her his magic tricks, but his brother, Ji, appears behind his back and reveals that his performance of magic is simply a sleight of hand, a fake. This opening scene then dissolves to the second scene, tracked by the moving surveillance camera.

This time, the camera looks into a room from the door where Jie’s father is filing his nails. Wei’s grandmother walks to his door and asks him to keep an eye on the boiling water on the kitchen stove. He soon leaves his room and closes the door, which allows the camera to focus in on a poster. The poster depicts congratulatory messages about the Republic of China’s ninetieth birthday and gives the audience a clue about his background as a veteran. When the camera stays focused on the poster, random conversations outside of this visual frame enter the film scene, confirming to the audience that Jie is adjusting the 8-God banner and others are busy making sticky rice dumplings.

The camera then pans to the right, matching up the soundtrack of their activities with these conversations before it dissolves into the scene captured by another camera panning into the *tsàu-kha*, a cooking place. This is a complicated image in traditional society. *Tsàu* is a word referring to the stove, which also includes a fireplace beneath it,

and *kha* is a place. *Tsàu-kha* is thus a compound word that literally means “the place of the stove”; its functions heavily structure the household's division of labor based on one's particular role in the family. When a cooking place is understood as *tsàu-kha*, it suggests not just a family kitchen, but a community-based family structure, consisting of a big family with three generations—grandparents, parents, and children—living together, or several families in a compound sharing a cooking place. This community-based way of living is rarely seen in modern cinema because it defies the mainstream nuclear-family centered way of living that international audiences expect. This immediately raises the question why Chang chooses to represent this “uncommonly” seen lifestyle.

For the contemporary generation of Taiwanese young adults—the younger audience as described in the last section—these seemingly pointless fragments of shots evoke their childhood memories and situate this summer adventure story in a community-based family model that defies the mainstream imagination of a modern urbanized city. The reason why these underrepresented groups of city dwellers continue this way of life is in order to survive in a big city. Such practices create a strong sense of reality, but they have been cast by mainstream social groups as backwards and undesirable in the dominant discourse of pro-economic development. This is the reality that the audience identifies with, making it a realistic film in their experience.

That shared neighborhood cooking place brings Jie's family closer to Wei's, turning them into a communal family. In fact, their interactions have become so close that it is sometimes difficult to tell they are from two different families. The camera's pan unites them, as well, as opposed to cutting between *two* families. It stands in the corner of

the cooking place, turning first to the left to show that Jie's brother, Ji, is washing his feet on the other side of the kitchen place and complaining to his father about how hot the water is. Jie's father scolds Ji for his improper behavior while taking the boiled rice dumplings out from the hot caldron and handing them to Dudu, Wei's younger sister. She takes them to the other side of the house and hangs them up under the eaves to cool down. Chang makes the next cut to move *outside* this extended family. The scene then cuts out of the cooking place and moves to Jie and Wei sneaking a break from the preparation of the festival to step outside of the eaves, cheerfully shouting in the rain. This is their world, marked by a cut that is *discontinuous* with the world of the cooking place.



Figure 12: Jie shows Min how he makes a coin disappear.

These opening scenes vividly capture the interactions between Wei and his family members. These interactions evoke a traditional family model that depends on community cooperation. As Figure 12 shows, Jie keeps Min occupied by showing her how he makes a coin disappear in the living room. He tries to cheer her up and distract her attention from not being able to participate in preparing for the upcoming Dragon Boat Festival with her family. Wei, Dudu, their father, and their grandmother are only a foot away, discussing how to properly hang the banner. They walk up and down by the door, but Min has to stay in the house due to her illness. The camera position sets the audience into a position within the scene, as if it were sitting at the corner of the living room as a guest of these two families and observing how they are busy running in and outside of the house to prepare for the festival.



Figure 13: Jie and Ji eat at the same table with Wei's family.

Figure 13 is excerpted from the eating scene that also demonstrates how Wei's family takes in Jie's family. This one-minute-and-fifty-second long take presents two families sitting around a round table and eating together like a small community whose hierarchy is based upon age and life experience. Their interaction is casual. The TV is broadcasting news loudly when Wei enters the dining room with his upper body naked and a t-shirt hanging over his shoulder. He has just finished showering. On his way to the dining room, he sees Jie's father sitting under the eaves. He tries to urge him not to drink too much alcohol before he sits down with the rest of the family, but he does so in a respectful manner. As soon as he enters the dining room, however, Wei's father demands that he put on his shirt. Wei initially resists and argues with his father. He gives in when his grandmother sides with his father and orders him to put on his shirt. During Wei's quarrel with his father, Jie talks to his father sitting outside and fills his bowl with food before asking Ji to give the bowl to their father—another gesture recognizing generational hierarchies. Dudu fills everyone's bowl with rice and makes sure her sister, Min, has what she wants in her bowl. Other random talk and interactions among characters also occur in this eating scene simultaneously without immediate cause-effect relations.

In contrast to beautified realism, this cinematic tradition that complicates the simple cause-effect relationship overtly evoked by the characters in the story is what Chang Tso-chi inherited from the first generation of New Taiwanese Cinema directors. This implication of how the characters are conditioned by their living circumstances continues to dominate Chang's storytelling, but his camera *shows* it instead of explaining it. An

experienced audience of New Taiwanese Cinema films would have taken for granted that the cinematic realism they assume Chang presents in his films, since fragments of his narrative shots resemble those forms used by the first generation of New Taiwanese Cinema directors.

It is no surprise that Chang situates this summer adventure story in an urban setting, as a modernized urban city has become a common living experience for Taiwanese audiences. However, his choice of focusing on two families from the lower ladders of social class reveals the hard “reality” that Chang captures in his film and uses to allude to the reality in a capitalizing society often intentionally ignored by mainstream discourse. Chang is ready to add his personal critique to this new changing society—a capitalizing city. He not only presents how his protagonists are conditioned by their living conditions but also moves to probe the interplays between the protagonist and the object of his desire. This probing—marked by the difference between a camera that pans and one that cuts between two realities—challenges audiences’ reception of New Taiwanese Cinema’s traditional syntaxes of cinematic realism and speaks to the contemporary generation of younger film audiences who appeal to a broader vision of what the nation's citizenship actually looks like and who share the burden a young citizen would face in his/her city in a late capitalist society.



Figure 14: Wei's living community is located at the edge of an urban city.

Jie's obsession with conjuring tricks, Wei's worship of Bruce Lee, Min's love for fish tanks, and the affection that Zhe—Min's ex-boyfriend—has for playing piano reveal to the audience the film's perspective—a generation of Taiwanese young adults that Chang Tso-chi has targeted. These young characters, though trapped in the poor neighborhood of a city and facing family issues that they could not change, share hobbies with the young audience members who are usually from the upper rungs of society in terms of family background and educational opportunities. They also share the dominant idea of living with the hope that hard work in a society with few barriers can achieve prosperity, success, and upward social mobility for the whole family.

As the establishing shot (Figure 14) shows, modern tall buildings full of “decent” modern condos surround Wei’s living community on one side; a stinky ditch embraces it from the other. Hard work may bring prosperity and success, as symbolized (and promised in mainstream storytelling) by the modern tall buildings, but it always comes with a cost—a filthy, stinky ditch and an old dilapidated building in the nearby neighborhood in this case. Yet at the same time, Chang is not restricting his young heroes in advance; they are very aware of where they stand. Fragments of conversations that Wei’s grandmother has with other elders in the community and his father hint that an urban renewal plan has forced a majority of the community residents to relocate. She thus becomes anxious about how to relocate the whole family since they do not have enough savings to move to a better community. Her anxiety often becomes annoying, as she chatters, appearing on and off the screen. Occasionally, she takes it out on her son and blames him for the housing issues. Though the two young protagonists hear her chatter and experience how changes caused by the urban renewal development are destroying the community, they hardly share her concern. They understand what she is saying and that she is dealing with current issues. It is difficult for them to even consider the responsibility of relocating the family to a better community when they can barely support themselves by working several part-time jobs.

In traditional cinema, making a living would have burdened these two young protagonists and kept them from enjoying small surprises in life. But Wei’s narration reveals that he “. . . thought of myself a happy guy, a particular kind of person, not much of a dreamer,” showing that these young adults do not have their mind completely

occupied by the misfortunes that they encounter in life. Instead, they tend to interpret their life hardships as bumps they hit on their road of life. It is this first person I-narrator that reserves a sense of hope in this tragic story and keeps the story from being reduced to a formulaic plot.

### **I-Narrator: To Provoke a Social Change**

The first person I-narration is characteristic of the 1980s New Taiwanese Cinema films, but Chang has not only adapted this technique, he has also extended it.<sup>65</sup> Such a narration was very provoking during martial law Taiwan because it challenged the Kuomintang (KMT) party-state government's political ideologies. First-person narration exposes a first-hand opinion or experience, one that may differ from what is officially expected—for instance, in interpretations of social changes brought about by urbanization.

Again, Chang takes up a legacy established by the first generation of New Taiwanese Cinema directors and extends it. In this case, he breaks new ground in constructing filmic representations by connecting this I-narration to the objects of the narrator's desire, particularly the fish tank. The fish tank appears in the opening scene showing Wei's house, and it seems to be simply a common stage prop throughout the film until the closing scene. Then it is revealed that Min purchased the fish tank when she broke up with her boyfriend and returned home for her cancer treatment. Thus, it reminds her of the happy time she had with Zhe, her ex-boyfriend, when they scuba dived

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<sup>65</sup> See *In Our Time* (1982) and *A Time to Live, A Time to Die* (1985) for examples.

together in the ocean. After work, Wei usually sits in front of the fish tank to relax, observing the swimming fish. Staring at the fish tank with its interior design of a tropical sea world allows these young adults to temporarily forget about the issues and troubles they face in real life.

Such moments of relief create a mood that challenges another of the audience's assumptions about New Taiwanese Cinema's conventions of realism: that representations of real-life experiences in film are usually heavily marked as references to political and historical issues. In one sense, this assumption of realism remains valid in *The Best* because Chang continues to tell this story of Wei and Jie as they confront contemporary issues, as might be expected from a summer adventure story that conforms to the realism of 1980s New Taiwanese Cinema.

But Chang has made this convention his own. What made *The Best* popular among local audience groups is its accurate depiction of the changing social milieu, shifting what kinds of politics are represented. Whereas the 1980s New Taiwanese Cinema films focused on personal reflections of Taiwan's politics and history that used to be dominated by the KMT's political ideology, Chang's film instead emphasizes immediate societal problems, instead. Although the 1980s New Taiwanese Cinema's films also focused on underrepresented groups, bringing single parenting, poverty, victims of urban renewal, gang activity, barriers to education, and the like onto the screen, these issues were usually treated as results or even footnotes to a certain political and historical period. Chang, in contrast, represents these issues as connected to the downsides of economic development

driven by capitalism and their direct impact on individuals; he discusses them with reference to individual reactions and sentiments rather than big-picture history.

This is not hard to see as a continuity between two generations of social-critical directions. Chang attacks dominant ideologies to provoke audiences into supporting social movements, just as his predecessors do in the local context, but he pitches his films to appeal specifically to young urban residents. He challenges mainstream capitalist models of economic development more subtly, by documenting the deteriorating living conditions in which these young adults from underrepresented groups survive. They are challenged not simply because they are country people trying to fit into a big city, as many earlier New Taiwanese Cinema films would have stressed. They are not out of place. Even the family's grandmother understands the concept of paying relocation fees—the characters are both traditional and in tune with modern life.

Chang is writing for a generation that experiences another kind of challenge: they can't change their lives by returning to the supposed peace of a pre-industrialized rural place. Unlike the previous generation that grew up in countryside villages and moved to cities for better employment opportunities, the contemporary Taiwanese young adults represented in *The Best* grew up in cities. For them, their bond to the land is in an inherited space, the kitchen that is preserved within an urban city and under attack in new ways by modernization. Their family traditions are intact (again, they are not lost), but their milieu changes too quickly. They care not for where they are as much as what they have and remember—permanent reference points in an era of constant change.

This explains these young characters' obsession with small objects, such as a martial arts weapon, a fish tank, an electronic keyboard, a magic pen, etc. These portable objects symbolize memories—moments of life—that they can carry with them; although they are consumer objects, they are subsumed into the new family context in the city to offer portable reference points to a new identity, not the old, place-bound identities. They do not grow tired of playing with these objects, because they face life through their lens. They are victims of the capitalism-driven economic development (urban renewal plans, for example), but they cannot leave the city either. They enjoy the life a modern city offers and have lost the ability to survive outside of an urban setting.

Yet Chang depicts them not as total victims of capitalism, but as capable of enjoying moments of pure being, when these young city dwellers play with the objects of their desire and find a strong sense of reality in the moment. But they cannot escape life, which makes this summer adventure story tragic.



Figure 15: A unicorn appears when Min asks Jie to turn into reality what she has in her mind.

As this strong sense of reality in the present underscores the inescapability of city life, these young city dwellers begin to expect changes that can improve their living conditions. To make changes possible, this awareness of “I” becomes crucial. As Wei’s first-person narration insists, Jie’s conjuring tricks are more than a hobby that he practices to enjoy momentary relief from real life issues. Instead, he hopes that he can engage life through magic by transforming anything unfortunate. And here, the *magic*

enters the reality of life as something physically present leading into the future, not a ghost from the past.<sup>66</sup>

Sporadic and seemingly unrelated mysterious incidents begin to occur and conclude the film in a mostly unexpected way. These mysterious incidents include animals appearing from nowhere, disappearing, and/or transforming into a different animal on the screen; Jie killing the head of a rival gang with an unloaded gun; the supposedly deceased Jie coming back to life and escaping with Wei from the pursuit of the rival gang members. As Figure 4 shows, Min wishes that a unicorn would appear so that her cancer would be magically cured. A reasonable explanation follows this mysterious incident, which inhibits Jie's ability to conjure, restoring this tragic story to reality. These mysterious incidents have planted doubts and shaken their belief in their inability to escape reality. When Wei later finds that the only bullet they have actually lies under his pillow, he rises up to take revenge. Jie comes back to life after he ambushes the newly appointed head of the rival gang. Jie reappears at the place where Wei witnesses him being hacked up and then shot. This time, Wei learns to fight alongside Jie; they escape together from the rival gang members and succeed in escaping into a world that shields them from these mishaps in reality.

The cinematic realism that Chang inherits from the traditions of New Taiwanese Cinema begins to take a different form in how he concludes this summer adventure story. Critics tend to regard the last scene of *The Best* as a simple repetition of the ending of his

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<sup>66</sup> Chris Berry, "Haunted Realism: Postcoloniality and the cinema of Chang Tso-chi," *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, Popularity and State of the Arts* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 33-50.

*Darkness and Light* (1999), an ending that sutures the cinematic “real” world with the protagonist’s psychological world.<sup>67</sup> They often express their disappointment with Chang’s playing the same trick twice. Audiences who had fallen for the surprise that Chang presented in *Darkness* are likely to share similar afterthoughts when they read these articles. However, these articles ignore the fact that the two films are by no means parallel—there are no scenes in *The Best* that parallel how Wei’s psychological world is set up. Instead, a series of mysterious incidents in *The Best* suspend the audience’s doubts about the reality of the cinematic world.

Upon closer examination, the epilogue of *The Best* does not simply repeat the ending of *Darkness* because Chang connects together a sporadic series of mysterious incidents that come together to alleviate the tension about the true-to-life tragedy that is to come and that tell a coherent story focusing on the boys rather than on circumstances. Jie’s coming-back-to-life reappearance on the screen is not so much mysterious as unforeseen: Chang composes a narrative that visualizes the uncanny experience many literary works have expressed, but not to break the narrative. These scenes of magic show hopes and dreams, rather than voices from the past. This brings us back to the bridge scene that, in one sense, invokes a sense of the uncanny as Sigmund Freud describes it, but in another, it enhances the integrity of this summer adventure story—Jie’s obsession with conjuring tricks becomes an uncanny backdrop for the story of these real lives.

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<sup>67</sup> Xie Renchang, “Meiyou guang, qingxiangyuhei qingxiang yu meili (shang)—Chang Tso-chi de meili shiguang” (Without light, close to darkness and close to beauty (part I): Chang Tso-chi’s *The Best of Time*), *Dianying xinshang* 112 (2002.9): 39-45. 686, “Yuheian yumeili—cong meili shiguang kan Chang Tso-chi dianying de chuanguo fangfa” [daker, more beautiful—discussing Chang Tso-chi’s creative methods from *The Best of Time*], *Zhanglaoshi yuekan* (Dec. 2012): n. p.



Figure 16: Neighbors in the community provide their testimonies to the rescue team.



Figure 17: Wei and Jie jump into the ditch to escape from the rival gang's pursuit.

The film's tragedy ends in what seems to be a suicide. Neighbors in the community gather on the bridge reporting to the police what they witnessed while the rescue team searches in the water for two missing teenagers. Jie enters this scene, looking for Ji, his younger brother, who has teamed up with the neighbors and then tells Jie what they have seen. Ji says to Jie that he not only saw two teens jump off the bridge, but that he had also identified Jie as one of the teens because his appearance and outfit were similar to Jie's. Although the audience does not know whether the rescue team finds the missing teens, this bridge scene paves the way for the closing scene of *The Best* when the gang members surround Jie and Wei, closing in on them from both sides of the bridge, as Figure 6 shows. They have to jump into the filthy drainage ditch, a fate which not only confirms the prophecy revealed by Ji, but also presents a version of how they are doomed to tragedy.

Up to this point in the film, these mysterious events have suspended audience's doubts about the reality that *The Best* represents. It is, however, the closing scene that finally completely overturns the audience's assumption about this reality, and they see that the film's (Ji's) illusions and tricks are very real. What follows after they jump into the ditch is a scene where Wei and Jie are swimming freely beneath the ocean surface, in a sea world whose background designs are identical to that of the fish tank that Wei's deceased sister adored so much. This last scene of the sea world connects with the film's series of sporadic mysterious incidents to project an image of two young men who need to change in order to find a world where social changes will happen, where first

generation young Taiwanese city dwellers can have the hope of improving their standing in society.

The I-narration reappears in the last scene to remind the audience of the happier moments that *The Best* is able to preserve in this tragic story. On the other hand, it inevitably brings the audience to question the choices these young characters have made and to consider what other choices they actually have: how could this have ended better? And this is the art of this particular film: Chang insists on showing the strength of inescapable reality and tragedy that continues to provoke the contemporary Taiwanese film audience, the first generation of young city dwellers, into supporting social movements that support underrepresented groups.

### **Conclusion: Pitching at “Glocal” Audiences across East Asia**

Up to this point, I have examined the conventions of cinematic realism that Chang inherited from his predecessors in the local context in order to show how he continued the tasks that the first generation of New Taiwanese Cinema directors began and how he pitched a different kind of filmmaking to a generation of Taiwanese young adults. I have used *The Best of Times* (2001) to demonstrate how Chang’s depiction of the first generation of city dwellers could win him recognition among local audience groups by challenging their habits of viewing and understanding. The popular reception of this film suggests that a generation of Taiwanese young adults now has become aware of social issues affecting their contemporaries in a society stressed by modernity. The recognition of Chang’s films in South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan demonstrate that young adults from

East Asian societies can share interests and concerns on the screen and can enjoy films about their societies' confrontations with modernity and foreign cultures. Chang's films stress their shared experiences and thus creates a new audience that reads films, which brings these audiences together to imagine East Asia in new ways.

## Chapter Three

### Narrative Identity in Chang Tso-Chi's *Soul of a Demon* (2007)

#### Introduction

The moderate success of *Ah Chuang* (1996), *Darkness and Light* (1999), and *The Best of Times* (2001) in Taiwan's film market shows that Chang's films were able to garner attention from a small group of local film audiences at the turn of the new millennium.<sup>1</sup> However, the narrative space that Chang Tso-Chi has successfully established among Taiwanese audience groups has tended to be understood as a commercial scheme catering to audiences receptive to mainstream cinema, particularly in these films' adherence to a visual presentation of a happy ending scene.

Chang's *Soul of a Demon* (2008) asks us to reconsider such interpretations because it takes up a considerably more serious subject matter: the history of Taiwan under Japanese rule, its legacy, and its influence on the formation of Taiwanese identity. Topics concerning this identity formation have been heatedly discussed on the island and

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<sup>1</sup> *Zhonghua minguo bashiwunian dianying nianjian* [Cinema in the Republic of China 1996 Year Book], n. p. *Zhonghua minguo bashijiunian dianying nianjian* [1999 Taiwan Cinema Year Book], n. p. and *Zhonghua minguo jiushinian dianying nianjian* [2001 Taiwan Cinema Year Book], n. p.

also garner significant attention from scholars studying Taiwan.<sup>2</sup> The socio-political issues that Chang implies in his previous works have surfaced in *Soul* as determining its characters. And it is Chang himself who makes the connection between this film and his earlier work. During the public screenings of *Soul* in Taiwan's theaters, Chang's studio worked with a distribution company to organize re-screenings of his earlier films.<sup>3</sup> This promotion strategy reveals how Chang consciously situates *Soul* in the making of his cinema and how he intended his early works to help his audience understand more complicated films like *Soul*. In *Soul*, as we shall see, Chang uses the narrative space that he has opened up in moving beyond cinematic realism to propose to his audience in this later film a discussion of how the New Taiwanese Cinema (NTC) is to function in society and the public identity that it has evolved into.

During the time period when Chang made his film debut and sustained his filmmaking, a growing recognition of Taiwanese identity was emerging on the island as a dominant social trend.<sup>4</sup> If we situate Chang's filmmaking within this social milieu, it is clear to see that Chang hopes to offer his audiences visions of Taiwanese identity in ways that garner widespread attention. Yet this move to construct a Taiwanese identity also has to be understood as part of the unique cultural project of the first generation of NTC, a project that these directors introduced into the international arena starting in the 1980s. Moreover, a cinema trying to construct a Taiwanese identity can also offer a possible

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<sup>2</sup> Margaret Hillenbrand, "Murakami Haruki in Greater China," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 68.3 (August) 2009: 735-740.

<sup>3</sup> Chang Tso-Chi daoyan 2008 xinpian "hudie" guanfang buluoge [The Official Blog of Chang Tso-Chi's *Soul of a Demon* (2008)]. Pikebang, 2008. Web. 22 Feb. 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Chang Mao-Kuei, "On the Origins and Transformation of Taiwanese National Identity," *China Perspectives* 28 (2000): 51-70.

solution to the rising conflicts among different ethnic groups on the island that began in the 1990s.<sup>5</sup> The conflicts among ethnic groups resulted in large part from the state deliberately ignoring ethnic differences and from the unequal distribution of power that had sustained the dominant Chinese ideology imposed during martial law Taiwan.

As a follower of the first generation of NTC directors, Chang clearly intends to continue their program of understanding Taiwan as a unique culture. But in the first decade of the twenty-first century, he faces different challenges than he did when he began filmmaking in the 1990s. More recent scholarly studies have identified the target audience of the local film market in this new millennium as a new generation of young Taiwanese audiences, who were born after the 1980s and grew up during post-martial law Taiwan.<sup>6</sup> This generation of Taiwanese had throughout their lives enjoyed the results of various social reforms in a relatively liberal society and thus had become highly aware of Taiwan's history. From their schooling to stories of their grandparents' experiences surviving Japanese rule, the social milieu that characterizes post-martial law Taiwan encouraged them to access Taiwan's history from diverse perspectives. However, their understanding of the Japanese rule of Taiwan is filtered through their experiences of growing up while consuming Japanese popular culture, which often resulted in an overly generous picture of what Japanese rule over Taiwan meant. At the same time, the general public began to embrace Taiwanese identity more fervently, with a different image of what Japanese rule had meant to Taiwan. These two seemingly independent trends,

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<sup>5</sup> “Cong xin taiwanren dao jia taiwanren,” *Inter-Margins*. 5 April 1996 (accessed 15 May 2015).

<sup>6</sup> See Lu for the description of audience profiles through his surveying the movie-going pattern and Taiwan's film exhibition industry.

however, actually converged in public attempts to reclaim Taiwan as a unique culture.<sup>7</sup> The focus of this chapter will be to follow how this new generation of identity politics has influenced film narratives, transforming filmmaking into a social practice that Chang Tso-Chi, as one of the second generation of NTC directors, has sustained and expanded in his own way. Chang has drawn our attention to how a film may speak differently than the films of the first generation NTC directors had, as he demonstrates how local audiences can be brought to examine their contemporary society and to understand the positioning of Taiwan in a globalizing world. Certainly, this idea of speaking differently from the mainstream was not uniquely Taiwanese when it appeared in the last two decades of the twentieth century, encouraged by a form of globalization that still appeals today. Opinion-makers had tried to shape social movements in Taiwan during the last decades of the twentieth century, using what they called “voicing from the edge” (*bianyuan fasheng*) to restore Taiwan's identity and remove it from the continued effects of Japanese rule, in studies that began to proliferate in Taiwan's academic circles during the 1990s.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Chang's attempt to grapple with this history is certainly not unprecedented.

To address how Chang contributes to the overarching goal of understanding Taiwan as a unique culture, this chapter will contextualize Chang's *Soul* in Taiwan's evolution since the 1980s, as Taiwanese society “discovered” its identity again. I will

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<sup>7</sup> Wei's *Cape No. 7* (2008) released around the same time of Chang's *Soul* (2008) achieved landslide success in the local film market, providing a good example of how this history and the seemingly natural embrace of Taiwanese identity have become selling points for the local film industry.

<sup>8</sup> Chou Wan-yao's English dissertation, completed in 1991, is considered to be a pioneer work dedicated to the Japanese rule of Taiwan. Many Chinese scholarly books that contributed to the history of Taiwan under the Japanese rule were also published in Taiwan during the 1990s.

establish the climate in which Chang was working, beginning with an examination of the first group of films about Taiwan under Japanese rule, to lay out how these films read their culture “from the edge” and what resources they offer to the project of filmmaking. Thereafter, I will turn to the formation of this era's public sphere, where these films' directors meet their audiences, in order to establish what issues are examined in this group of films. After a short historical survey, I will then situate *Soul of a Demon* within a second group of films about Taiwan under Japanese rule to show what they share with their predecessors and what they do differently.

As the first scholarly discussion dedicated to introducing this film, I conclude my exploration by revisiting the idea of *narrative identity*. To do so, I will use Magarate Somer's 1994 model of how narrative identity intersects with social agency, as scholars discussing post-martial-law Taiwan (the 1990s) often take up as their focus.<sup>9</sup> Today, the making of Taiwanese identity has become a movement that is widely received among three generations of the Taiwanese and that is especially attractive for those whose formative years coincided with post-martial-law Taiwan.<sup>10</sup> As we shall see, two issues of a college magazine and the discussions it invites confirm these responses to the reforms of Taiwan's political system and democratization of its society.<sup>11</sup> Feminist scholars, social activists, and critics devote themselves to articles in these two issues that reveal the importance of taking into consideration gender and class issues in order to prevent any

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<sup>9</sup> Magarate Somers, “The narrative constitution of identity: a relational and network approach,” *Theory and Society* 23 (1994): 605-649.

<sup>10</sup> Gunter Schubert and Jens Damm. “Introduction.” *Taiwanese Identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Routledge, 2011): 1-16.

<sup>11</sup> *Jia Taiwanren* (1993.07.15) and *Nürenguo, Jia(jia) rentong* (1993.10.15).

<http://intermargins.net/intermargins/IsleMargin/index.htm> (accessed on 12 May 2015).

social movements from endorsing the state's hegemonic role. Taken together with Chang's film, they argue for the maturation of a new Taiwanese cultural identity and cultural politics.

### **The Recovery of the History of Taiwan under Japanese Rule in the New Taiwanese Cinema**

Although the first generation of New Taiwanese Cinema directors had begun to focus on social taboos in films made during the early 1980s, they subtly avoided political taboos before martial law was officially lifted in 1987. The history of Taiwan under Japanese rule is one such political taboo. Shortly after martial law was lifted, these directors used their films to encourage Taiwanese audiences to visit this repressed history and to publicly discuss it for the first time. *Strawman* (1987), *A City of Sadness* (1989), *Hill of No Return* (1992), *The Puppet Master* (1993), and *A Borrow Life* (1994) are examples of such invitations. Although the KMT-led government lifted martial law in 1987, Taiwanese people remained reticent after experiencing nearly 40 years of martial law, and so these films became significant as touchstones for the new context of cultural production in post-martial-law Taiwan (the 1990s). They tested whether the KMT-led government would say one thing and do another—if it would persecute these path-breaking producers of culture who confronted the government's older official understanding of Taiwan simply as another China. They confronted the equation of Taiwan and China that had been officially (and forcibly) disseminated for 40 years to see if a new social consensus could emerge while the old order still lingered in Taiwanese

people's memories, especially in the memories of those who had survived and received Mandarin-language education during Taiwan's martial law period (1949-1987).

The first group of these films has to be read against Taiwan's Mandarin cinema in order to better understand their significance in addressing this particular historical moment.<sup>12</sup> Sometimes without intending to do so, these directors and their films also became part of the social movements that challenged the KMT party-state regime before and after martial law was lifted.<sup>13</sup> The 50-year period of Japanese rule in the history of modern Taiwan is a result of the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), fought between the royal administration of China's Qing Empire (1644-1912) and Meiji Japan (1868-1912). A modern Chinese nation established in 1911 replaced the last Chinese royal administration; Japanese society during Meiji Japan moved from an isolated feudal society to its modern form. In contrast to the resentments that many Mainland Chinese people hold against the Japanese due to their invasion of Mainland China and their waging of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), most Taiwanese people do not hold as many grudges against the Japanese as the KMT-led government expected them to have. In order to survive Japanese rule, most Taiwanese people conformed to Japanese demands, conformities that remained habits even after the Japanese had left.

The result for Taiwan's position in the Asian Pacific ended up even more complicated. The KMT-led government ignored the reality that Taiwanese people had to

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<sup>12</sup> Taiwan's Mandarin cinema (also known as "nationalist cinema") was initiated in the early 1960s when the KMT government began to promote full-fledged Mandarin education on the island. Languages and dialects other than Mandarin were banned in schools and many public domains until martial law was lifted in the last 1980s. Creating a nationalistic, Mandarin-only cinema was important for fulfilling KMT policymakers' goal of ensuring that Mandarin be the only official language used on the island.

<sup>13</sup> Xiao Ye, *fangunba, Taiwan dianying* (Hong Kong: Yangguang weishi, 2011), 39-42; 46-47.

conform to Japanese rule in order to survive and so used “traitor” as an accusation to persecute a number of Taiwanese, mostly those who had received modern Japanese education in the hopes of obtaining skills that would enable them to become leaders and shapers of public opinion within the framework of the modern law system that the Japanese colonial government had established. This intentional eradication of one to two generations of Taiwanese elites and leaders resulted in the Formosa Massacre (1947) and the ensuing martial law era.<sup>14</sup> Taiwanese writers who had been educated towards the end of Japanese rule in Taiwan and who had escaped from the KMT purge demonstrated through their writings that they had begun to doubt their identification with “China” and had begun to question what “China” truly meant to them.<sup>15</sup>

When the KMT-led government relocated to Taiwan in 1949, this ignorance of the effects of Japanese rule on Taiwan continued, as Chiang Kai-shek—the leader of the KMT government at the time—never intended to permanently reside in Taiwan. His announcement of martial law was a strategic scheme to eliminate any rebellion from the locals that might threaten his control over Taiwan; he was actually preparing to use Taiwan as a military base to “Strike Back at Mainland China” (*fanggong dalu*). Chiang’s wishful thinking faced international challenges leading to setbacks that forced him and his government to reform their regime, particularly changing their attitude toward governing Taiwan.<sup>16</sup> This reform entailed different levels of modernization and was unlikely to be achieved overnight. Taiwan’s film industry, for example, witnessed an

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<sup>14</sup> Tillman Durdins, “Formosa Killings Are Put at 10, 000,” *The New York Times* (20 March 1947): 6.

<sup>15</sup> Wu Zuoliu, *Yaxiya de guer* (Taipei: Caogen, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Wang Zhenhuan, “Taiwan de zhengzhi zhuanxing yu fandui yundong,” *Taiwan zhehui yanjiu jikan* 2.1 (1989): 71-116.

unusual boom in propaganda films in the 1970s that can now be read as the KMT-led government's dying struggle to claim itself to be the sole legitimate modern Chinese nation.

Before these films about the history of Taiwan under Japanese rule, local productions that touched upon relations between Taiwan and Japan were mostly anti-Japanese war films, centering on the Second Sino-Japanese War that had occurred in Mainland China. However, in response to the international setbacks Taiwan suffered in the early 1970s, many Taiwanese Mandarin films set during the Second Sino-Japanese War were made to forestall questions about the legitimacy of the KMT-led government's rule over Taiwan.<sup>17</sup> They hoped to arouse patriotism by fostering anti-Japanese rhetoric among audience groups on the island.<sup>18</sup> The officials anticipated that the Taiwanese audiences, especially those who had experienced Japanese rule in Taiwan, would share the resentment harbored by their fellow Chinese who had fought the Japanese in Mainland China. The popular reception of these films seemed to confirm this logic.<sup>19</sup> However, Li Tianduo, a film scholar based in Taiwan, points out that the popular reception of these films was made possible on the island because the KMT-led government gained significant control over the film production and distribution systems

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<sup>17</sup> These films include Ting Shan-Hsi's *Eight Hundred Heroes* (1975), Chang Tseng-Chai's *Heroes in the Eastern Sky* (1975,) and Liu Chia-Chang's *Victory* (1975), etc.

<sup>18</sup> For a list of these anti-Japanese war films, see "Yingpian banquan" [Movie Copyright]. Zhongying gufen youxian gongsi, Central Picture Corporation, 2009. <http://www.movie.com.tw/home/> (accessed 25 Feb. 2015).

<sup>19</sup> Wang wei et al, *kuashiji Taiwan dianying shilu 1898-2000* (Taipei: Wenjianhui, 2005), 740.

during the 1970s.<sup>20</sup> Thus, these officials could make sure that local audiences had every opportunity to watch these films, even if it meant offering them free screenings.

A significant difference between the anti-Japanese war films and the NTC films about the history of Taiwan under Japanese rule is the NTC films' increasing attention to audiences of different generations. The ostentatious patriotic sentiment embedded in the anti-Japanese war films most likely catered to Chinese diaspora populations—those who resided outside of Mainland China—who may or may not have fought in the Second Sino-Japanese War. The Chinese remaining in Taiwan, for example—a small audience who survived China's Republican era (1911-1949)—had encountered the Japanese in wars and experienced how the Japanese military destroyed their homes and killed their families.<sup>21</sup> These anti-Japanese war films clearly enabled those Chinese refugees to memorialize their families in Mainland China, from whom they had been separated. However, this anti-Japanese sentiment could hardly be sustained among the majority of the local Taiwanese, who had not encountered war with the Japanese the way those on Mainland China had.

Such historical analogies do not conform to the experiences of the Taiwanese, however. The relationship between these two histories—Taiwan under Japanese rule and the Second Sino-Japanese War—are actually far-fetched in terms of both time and space. One took place in Mainland China from 1931 to 1945, and the other occurred in Taiwan between 1895 and 1945. These two histories overlap in time, but the wartime policies the

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<sup>20</sup> Li Tianduo, *Taiwan dianying, shehui yu lishi* (Taipei: Yatai tushu, 1997), 256-269.

<sup>21</sup> John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 297.

Japanese government implemented in these two places left different, sometimes even contradictory, experiences for Mainland Chinese refugees and the Taiwanese people. Moreover, the Japanese education that the Taiwanese people had received during the last decade of Japanese rule (1936-1945) had aimed at making them true Japanese and at distancing them from Mainland China.<sup>22</sup> The government's wartime policy of Japanization had allowed a significant number of Taiwanese people to receive a Japanese education, adopt Japanese names, dress like Japanese people, participate in Japanese culture, and comply with the Japanese legal system, etc.<sup>23</sup> This wartime policy gave Taiwanese people profoundly different experiences from those of the Chinese in Mainland China and the refugees from there that fled to Taiwan with Chiang Kai-shek. Thus, such war films once again demonstrated how the KMT-led government ignored the Taiwanese people's experiences under Japanese rule, even after KMT officials had resided in Taiwan for more than two decades. They simply had no will to accommodate the different experiences of history between the Chinese diaspora and the Taiwanese. Both groups age-wise could presumably be the same generation.

In contrast to the KMT officials and Chinese refugees from Mainland China, most of the audiences in Taiwan tended to consider these anti-Japanese films to be fabrications—blatant propaganda—because they do not share the same experience with the Japanese and Japanese culture in Taiwan. The anti-Japanese sentiment in them is even difficult to comprehend for the younger generation of Taiwanese film audiences—

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<sup>22</sup> Chou Wan-yao, "cong bijiao de guandian kan Taiwan yu Hanguo de huangminhua yundong 1937-1945," *Haixingxi de niandai—riben zhimin tongzhi moqi Taiwanshi lunji* (Taipei: Yunchen, 2004), 32-75.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Taiwan's baby boomer generation born between 1945 and 1965. For this generation of Taiwanese audiences, these anti-Japanese films were considered educational films about regional politics, as their plots, narratives, and intended political rhetoric became familiar historical narratives.<sup>24</sup> Taiwan's baby boomer generation continued to enjoy improvement in their material life in terms of living conditions and the conveniences of modern technologies. This experience of modernization with the increasing prevalence of Mandarin-language education began to form a bond among those in Taiwan's baby boomer generation, even though they were likely to speak different languages and to have slightly different cultural practices at home. The improvement in living conditions and the cultivation of education were followed by the need for consumption, including consuming Taiwan's Mandarin films. The anti-Japanese war films demonstrate to them a trend in Taiwan's Mandarin film, but those films feel dated to them, causing them to lose interest after attending a couple of screenings.

Lu Fei, a film scholar, candidly acclaims that Taiwan's Mandarin films were made 1) to "civilize" the Taiwanese audience by inculcating them with Mandarin language and manners and 2) to target the overseas Chinese audience who had spent a significant amount of their formative years in Mainland China during its Republic era but who had since relocated to a foreign country and established their families there.<sup>25</sup> Since the commencement of Taiwan's Mandarin cinema in the 1960s, it had always grown to serve the government or to be used as a tool for windfall money. With the government's

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<sup>24</sup> *The Everlasting Glory* (1973), *Heroes behind the Enemy Lines* (1975), *Eight Hundred Heroes* (1975) and *Heroes in the Eastern Sky* (1975) are examples.

<sup>25</sup> Lu Fei, *Taiwan dianying: Zhengzhi, jingji, meixue 1949-1994* (Taipei: Yuanliu, 1998), 160.

support for production and distribution during the first two decades of its growth, Taiwan's Mandarin films, with their various trends, began to be popular among Taiwan's baby boomer generation, many of whom were the first generation in their families to receive a Mandarin-language education. As noted, this young generation of Taiwanese film audiences spent their formative years in martial law Taiwan (1949-1987), while capitalist economic development continued to dominate and to accelerate different levels of modernization in society. Taiwanese audiences from the baby boomer generation were certainly familiar with mainstream anti-Japanese war films, their theme songs, and their leading actors and actresses. They would have been able to hum along with these songs, even though they might not share the anti-Japanese sentiment that these films intentionally propagated because they were growing up under different politics. When Taiwan's release companies import different kinds of genre movies to provide greater choice for the audience's consumption, they tend to chase the trends created by intensive advertisement. As further economic development continues to stabilize Taiwanese society, films that were made to promote political propaganda inevitably lost the interest of audiences.

Yet again, the situation is not that simple when one considers forces other than generational ones. Films about Taiwan under Japanese rule were made to respond to the emerging audience at the time. Owing to Taiwan's new political stability and improvements in living conditions, a new audience appeared first in the local film market, calling for a different kind of film. These audiences usually had received higher education and had watched many western classical films, not just the Taiwanese

Mandarin films. More importantly, this demographic watched many films that had circulated through international film festivals based in Europe. These audiences were also influenced by western philosophical thought, including but not restricted to socialist criticism, and so it quickly learned to consider film as more than a political propaganda tool or a product for consumption. Peggy Chiao, a film critic based in Taiwan, uses “the intellectuals” (*zhishi fenzi*) or “the college-educated student” (*daxuesheng*) to define this group of audiences within Taiwan’s baby boom generation.<sup>26</sup>

With the passage of time, it appears unlikely that we will ever recover a fully accurate composition of this audience group, but socio-economic surveys conducted during the 1960s and 1970s may give us a clue to understanding its composition. According to statistics, the majority of Taiwanese families had begun to enjoy a steady increase in their annual income, but expenditures on entertainment consumption, including movie tickets, remained incidental.<sup>27</sup> In other words, even these (college-educated) audience members would be very selective about the films they chose to see, trying to satisfy their critical pursuits as well as stay within their entertainment budgets. Intriguingly, they did not grow interested in film solely through watching Taiwan’s Mandarin films. The higher education and public screenings of western artistic films offered by Taiwan’s National Film Archive (also known as the Chinese Taipei Film Archive) also helped them learn to read film as a text.<sup>28</sup> As a consequence, these audiences tended to read more serious writing and to watch a variety of films circulating

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<sup>26</sup> Peggy Chiao, “Cong dianying wenhua chufa—xu,” *Taiwan xindianying* (Taipei: Shibao, 1988), 15.

<sup>27</sup> Lu Fei, “Chart 20.c,” *Taiwan dianying: Zhengzhi, jingji, meixue 1949-1994* (Taipei: Yuanliu, 1998), n.p.

<sup>28</sup> Peggy Chiao, “Qianyan—huanjing, lishi, benzhi,” *Taiwan xindianying* (Taipei: Shibao, 1988), 23.

through international film festivals, not just the mass-market films made for Taiwan or the overseas Chinese market, cultivating their visual literacy. This education also helped them better understand the films they found interesting so that they gradually became critical about local film productions, no matter how well made, when they became simple commodities or vehicles for political propaganda.<sup>29</sup>

As part of Taiwan's baby boomer generation, these young audiences disliked the political propaganda embedded in anti-Japanese war films, but they could not completely resist the cultivation of patriotism they received in school and society. The result was a split attitude toward local film production: one either boycotted it or tried to improve it. Both choices could be considered expressions of Taiwanese patriotism, as they both show concern for the quality and reputation of the local film production. The initiation of the first film magazine during 1970s Taiwan can be read as an attempt to introduce to Taiwanese audiences the idea that films can be more than a commodity or a political propaganda tool.<sup>30</sup> In addition to introducing many internationally acclaimed film directors and their works in this magazine, the editorial board also published film reviews or opinions to invite serious discussions about local film productions. The readership of this magazine remained small, as it spoke to an emerging group of the young college-educated film audiences.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Peggy Chiao, "Cong dianying wenhua chufa—xu," *Taiwan xindianying* (Taipei: Shibao, 1988), 16.

<sup>30</sup> This magazine is *Yingxiang [Influence]* (1971-1979).

<sup>31</sup> Chen Dinger, "qiling niannai dianying piping de duoshou—'yingxiang' zazhi," *Houxiandai wenxue*, National Taiwan University After Modern Literature, 2010. [http://after-modern-literature.blogspot.com/2010/12/blog-post\\_2808.html](http://after-modern-literature.blogspot.com/2010/12/blog-post_2808.html) (accessed 21 April 2015).

The film magazine's program was very intentional. Around the time the magazine's first run was about to be discontinued, it published the editorial board's selection of "the ten best rotten movies" (*shida zuijia lanpian*) of the year and commented on these films.<sup>32</sup> Reporters from major newspapers reported about this selection with the intent of inciting or instigating social debates within different camps of film workers, writers, and critics. Few at the time could accurately recite what main issues had actually been raised, but it left the majority of the Taiwanese film audience with the impression that a group of young college-educated students advocated a boycott of Taiwan's Mandarin film (*jukan guopian*). Responses to these debates interpreting the "best rotten movie" selection as an act of whistle-blowing with good intentions—to improve Taiwan's film culture—tended to be less read. As Fu Xinming's article suggests, perhaps the most beneficial way to read the selection of the ten best rotten movies was to see it as an expression of how an emerging group of young film audiences used their pens to hopefully cultivate a film culture where film, like literature, can be read as a cultural text.<sup>33</sup>

### **The New Taiwanese Cinema: An Emerging Public Sphere**

Soon after the appearance of this new group of younger audiences within the baby boom generation, Taiwan's Mandarin film began to lose a majority of the local audiences as well as the overseas Chinese viewership. This fiscal crisis for the industry shortened

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<sup>32</sup> "shida zuijia lanpian," *Yingxiang* (1977): n. p.

<sup>33</sup> Fu Xinming, "Cong 'jukan guopian' tan dianying yu zhishi fenzi," *Xiaochao* 4.1 (1978.1): 42-44.

the time available for film workers, critics, and writers to ponder over issues that the social debates had raised, leaving them with almost no time to figure out if films made to cultivate their audiences' literacy would by definition be able to compete with Taiwan's mainstream Mandarin film for many audience groups, as these two types of films are aimed at two different kinds of audiences.

The fact that the social debate coincided with the industry's crisis led to a quirky and openly specious assessment of the situation for Taiwan's filmmakers. That is, their first reaction to this advocacy to boycott Taiwan's Mandarin films and the promotion of films produced to cultivate audiences' literacy cultivation actually led to the collapse of Taiwan's film production industry in the following decades. In reality, the loss of the local and overseas markets for Taiwan's films in the early 1980s and the collapse of its film production industry had their roots in many factors. The only generalization that one can be sure of is that Taiwan's mainstream cinema that had, up to this point, always been produced purely for consumption or for political propaganda then faced the challenge of how to speak to Taiwan's multiple baby boomer generation(s) and young generations of audiences, whether they were the offspring of migrants from mainland China or of local Taiwanese.

The first solution the filmmakers found was a fairly typical industry response. Even when the films' exorbitant costs garnered only meager returns, the state-owned Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC) was still willing to produce war films with

increasingly bigger budgets.<sup>34</sup> Social critics found another approach to making the most of the opportunities that CMPC offered the first generation of NTC directors: the CMPC's focus on economics meant that the directors could make different kinds of films with CMPC funds as long as they remained “low budget/low risk” productions.<sup>35</sup>

As we have seen earlier in this study, that first generation of NTC directors is part of the first wave of Taiwan's post-World War II baby boomer generation. In their 30s, they seized the opportunities provided by the industrial crisis to make films about how they spent their formative years in post-World War II Taiwan. It is also significant that many of these directors are the offspring of the Chinese residents in Taiwan, and they shared similar growing-up experiences with the offspring of the Taiwanese who had survived the fifty-year Japanese rule in Taiwan. This shared experience enabled them to focus on undeniable political facts as their film's themes: the Japanese rule of Taiwan and its continuing influence on post-World War II Taiwanese society.

Growing up during post-World War II Taiwan constantly reminded both these filmmakers and their audiences that the Japanese rule of Taiwan was not only history but also a reality. The island's infrastructure—including the public school systems, tap water pipelines, railways, electricity, Japanese-style dormitories, and Japanese tones in the speech of their parents or elderly neighbors, etc.—continued to provide them close encounters with Japanese culture in Taiwan even after the Japanese government left.<sup>36</sup> In

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<sup>34</sup> Lu Tonglin, “Taiwan New Cinema and Its Legacy,” *The Chinese Cinema Book* (London: BFI, 2011), 133.

<sup>35</sup> Li Tianduo, *Taiwan dianying, shehui yu lishi* (Taipei: Yatai tushu, 1997), 185-187.

<sup>36</sup> Wu Zhengzhong, *Chufang zhiwu: shenti he kongjian de richangshenghuo dilixue kaocha* (Taipei: lianjing, 2010), 254.

other words, the ethnic conflicts between the Taiwanese and Chinese residents that had led to the 1947 Taiwan massacre remained in place as virtually unsolvable and, more importantly, were transformed in the popular mind into a problem in one's private life. As *A Borrowed Life* (1994) reveals, the points of disagreement often took place between two generations within a Taiwanese family. In *A Borrowed Life*, the father of the family always listens to Japanese radio and remembers fondly his Japanese teacher. In his old age, his primary wish is to visit Japan to see his Japanese teacher as well as Mount Fuji and the Royal Palace. However, his children were born in post-World War II Taiwan and received Mandarin educations that taught them to consider the Japanese to be evil and to pledge themselves to a modern Chinese nation led by the KMT. In a scene when the father tried to help his daughter paint a picture of the national flag, he colored the shape of the sun red instead of white—a contrast between the Japanese national flag and the national flag of the Republic of China. This supposedly friendly interaction between the father and his daughter, not surprisingly, then ends in a quarrel. This conflict simply shows the tip of this particular iceberg—the frustration of the Taiwanese pre-World War II generation that spent their formative years during the last decade of Japanese rule and survived World War II. Due to the change in the political rule on the island, their survival experiences and memories were ignored or even forcibly repressed by themselves and by their own offspring.

The first generation of NTC directors is a group of pioneers in this sense, as their portrayals of Taiwan under Japanese rule complicate the patriotic sentiments embedded in the anti-Japanese war films that their audiences were used to seeing. Trying to bridge

the gap between the two generations, the directors use films to tell stories about how Taiwanese people survived the Japanese rule of Taiwan (e.g. *Strawman*) or how they grew up living in a Japanese-style dorm during martial-law Taiwan (e.g. *A Time to Live, A Time to Die*). A Taiwanese puppet master's autobiography further impresses its audience groups, as his story reveals his first-hand experience encountering the Japanese and Japanese culture before and after World War II (e.g. *The Puppetmaster*). These films call explicitly for recognition of the history of Taiwan, especially the effects of Taiwan's occupation by the Japanese, which is unprecedented in Taiwan's film history. In this way, these films are considered "new" in the history of Taiwanese cinema, not only in their style and topics, but also in terms of their content and address to their audiences.

These portrayals of Taiwan under Japanese rule and its continuous influence on post-World War II Taiwan (the 1950s and 1960s) were in fact a very popular trend in Taiwan's domestic film market during the 1990s. However, this new cinema should not be considered as part of Taiwan's mainstream Mandarin cinema. The first generation of NTC directors used Taiwanese dialects in their films, which was groundbreaking since those dialects had been banned in the 1960s. The production, circulation, and reception of these new cinema films are distinct in that they come from this alternate historical impulse. Although they may not always have come to be seen as the blockbusters of the year, the first generation NTC directors and their films were able to garner the attention of the young college-educated audience that began to emerge in the late 1970s, as noted above. This younger audience had closely observed these NTC directors and their works

since they were college students in the 1980s, and they seem to understand more than a singular frame of history.

More importantly, these first generation NTC directors are infusing public voices into what had been a state-controlled industry. Their passion for and love of cinema enabled many of them to aspire to work directly in the film industry or as critics, college professors, film festival organizers, etc. in their late 20s or early 30s. At the same time, they continue to serve on the editorial boards of Taiwan's leading film-related journals and magazines to introduce western award-winning films and to promote local film productions, realizing that film can and must be read as a cultural text, not just as ideology or a commodity.<sup>37</sup> As audience members turned from college students to working professionals, they closely observed the local productions that shared what they saw as the project of their generation—using filmmaking as a tool to tell audiences in and outside of Taiwan stories about Taiwanese history and culture. In this sense, they function as a cadre of intellectual laborers—news reporters, film critics, scholars, social activists, opinion leaders, and so on—who support not only a national project, but also the discussions needed by the audiences. These films and discussions appear in the form of articles, film reviews, interviews, scholarly articles, and academic publications, etc., that are gauged to create a public forum that will later become a public sphere in society, where their issues will be more broadly debated. Mizou and Liang Xinhua's *Xindianying zhiwai/hou* (1994), a collection of film reviews and news opinions about the role of film

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<sup>37</sup> See the editorial board of *Film Appreciation Academic Journal* [*dianying xinshang xuekan*] for an example.

as a new media, offer us an idea of what issues first appeared in this emerging public sphere. This emerging space, of course, follows and facilitates the most obvious thread of discussion in Taiwan's society: its recognition of its repressed history—Taiwan under the Japanese rule. As Mizou and Liang, along with other contributors to this collection, saw it, a primary element of Taiwan's identity lies in acknowledging the very different generational experiences conditioned by the extreme politics and oppression to which Taiwan had been subjected in the twentieth century and the economic forces of globalization today.

The interconnectedness between films about Taiwan under Japanese rule and the public sphere that helps promote discussions about related issues reach a climax in 1997, when Taiwan's National Translation and Compilation Center published *Understanding Taiwan*, a new history textbook for secondary schools. This institute used to be the sole supplier of textbooks for elementary and secondary schools. Even after private Taiwanese companies were permitted to publish textbooks, the textbooks published by this institute were still considered essential for the Taiwanese college entrance exam. In *Understanding*, the 50-year Japanese rule of Taiwan is described as a positive influence for the first time in a textbook used in Taiwan's compulsory education. This change of rhetoric in the history textbook is radical because it implies that the KMT-led Chinese regime was a foreign rule, one that needs to be considered in the same terms as the Japanese regime and one that was possibly even more oppressive on the level of identity because of the false analogy drawn between Taiwan and Mainland Chinese cultures. The rhetoric that *Understanding* forges suggests that the KMT-centered Chinese ideology

faces significant crisis as the younger generation of Taiwanese who were born and raised during the last decade of the twentieth century learns to identify with Taiwan rather than the “China” that the KMT party-state in Taiwan had meticulously created and promoted during martial law, which was trying to align the mainland with the island in historically inappropriate ways. The publication of *Understanding Taiwan* and the debates it instigates in society thus successfully pushed this idea that Taiwan could be not only a topic for study, but also a hot topic for discussion in the emerging public sphere.<sup>38</sup>

This example of how the emerging group of young college-educated audiences interacted with the first generation of NTC directors during the last two decades of the twentieth century symbolizes the completion of a generation's task. Whatever their aesthetic failures might be, this group of directors and audiences had managed to establish a public sphere in society—a space for discussion on nation and identity that was not (completely) under government control—occupied by a generation of viewers ready to have that debate. Before Taiwan's film production industry entered the hibernation imposed on it by a subsequent economic downturn, the first generation of NTC directors occupied a space that was compelling enough to retain the interest of a young college-educated audience and to facilitate that audience's entry into the space of public discussion rather than a simple rejection of Taiwan's past.

Unfortunately, their project was necessarily of limited duration, as governmental support for the film industry waned and the industry was eventually set into the

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<sup>38</sup> Wang Fu-chang, “Minzu xiangxiang, zuqun yishi yu lishi—*Renshi Taiwan* jiaokeshu zhengyi fengbo de neirong yumailuo fenxi,” *Taiwanshi yanjiu* 8.2 (2001.12): 145-208.

globalized marketplace to sustain itself. This market of supply-and-demand for films on Taiwan's identity would remain small and unlikely to become self-sustaining, even in the very large global population of Mandarin speakers, if the suppliers could not increase the demand by other means. How to retain the audience that the NTC had built and to attract the next generation of the young Taiwanese audiences so that this public sphere could be sustained becomes the next phase of responsibility for the second-generation NTC directors to tackle. In the next section, I will argue that Chang Tso-Chi's *Soul of a Demon* is significant in that it not only moves forward the discussions about the study of Taiwan in the public sphere on Taiwanese identity but also attracts the next generation of the young Taiwanese audience. His earlier works in addressing the audience as people now pays off in his ability to address them as part of the history of modern Taiwan, a history that Asian Pacific societies often share due to a similar experience of encountering modernity forced on them by imperial powers.

### ***Soul of a Demon* (2008)**

Distinct from the films about Taiwan under the Japanese rule made by the first generation NTC directors, whose stories are often set in the past, *Soul of a Demon* sets its story in contemporary Taiwan. *Soul* is a story about Yizhe, a recently released inmate in his late 20s or early 30s, who returns home to settle for a fresh start. He took the blame for an assault that Ren, his younger brother, had committed, and Yizhe served three years in prison for it. After his release, Yizhe returns to his hometown, Nanfangao, a fishing town located on the coast of northeastern Taiwan. This return suggests that he now has to

face the gang trouble that caused his brother to commit such an assault in the first place. In addition, he also has to face his experience of being abandoned as a child to face childhood memories brought to the surface when he finds out that his father is also returning. He has expected this return for two decades—a timeline that, we must remember, puts his departure from Nanfangao just at the end of the era of KMT rule.

This family reunion seems at first to imply an opportunity for Yizhe to work out his grudge caused by his father's abandonment. However, the family issues and the tension between his gang and the rival gang in the community hinder him from settling into the village with a fresh start. Yizhe's search for a place to settle into and to be at home also brings him to visit Orchid Island (*Lanyu*), an island off the southeastern coast of Taiwan. He makes a trip to Orchid Island to visit his mother's tomb and the places where he had played when he was little. At this point, a relatively conventional narrative of historical transformation acquires a deeper relevance.

Yizhe's mother is actually not "Chinese," but rather is a Taiwanese aboriginal native to Orchid Island. After his father abandoned the family, Yizhe's mother returned with him and his brother to Orchid Island, a place that lays outside the main island of Taiwan. During his stay on Orchid Island, we gradually realize that Yizhe is not only in search of a place to settle but also of who he is. Yizhe's story may not be entirely accurate as a representation of "his" generation of Taiwanese whom Chang Tso-Chi targets in cultivating the next generation of young Taiwanese audiences. Nonetheless, his case is sufficiently applicable enough for us to inquire what Chang actually feels he can find in this new group of audiences within this young generation of Taiwanese. As part of

the second generation to receive Mandarin education, a generation that does not see that education strictly in anti-Japan terms, Yizhe finds it difficult to embrace the Chinese national identity that he was taught in school.

### **An Unspoken Search for Identity**

The fact that Yizhe was troubled by his Chinese identity suggests that he is likely to be born after the 1980s. Unlike Taiwan's baby boomer generation who was clear about the subversive intention and political implication embedded in the recovery of the history of Taiwan under the Japanese rule, the generation of Taiwanese that Yizhe is part of has been exposed only to a history education that centers on Taiwan and the experiences of older Taiwanese people's lives under Japanese colonial rule or martial-law Taiwan. Whether from a Taiwanese family or the family of a Chinese refugee now living in Taiwan, Yizhe's generation of Taiwanese grew up with this call for a new national identity that recognizes Taiwan and the Taiwanese people's experiences in society as its own entity in the Asia Pacific. Considering the history of Taiwan under Japanese rule often gives Yizhe's generation a sense of nostalgia because of the stories they heard from the older generation, especially as the number of Taiwanese who actually lived during Japanese rule is slowly diminishing.<sup>39</sup> As Yizhe revisits his childhood haunts, this review of his past brings him to reexamine his relationship to this place that is *not* simply

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<sup>39</sup> This article confirms this sense of nostalgia that contemporary young Taiwanese people tend to have after watching these classical films, including those about Taiwan under Japanese rule. It invites them to visit the film scenes in person as a way to satisfy this sense of nostalgia. Wang Yuyan, et al, "Kanguopian youtaibei: dianying jingdian tacha shouxuan," *Fangying zhoubao* 246 (12 Feb. 2010): n.p. (accessed on 29 April 2015).

“Chinese” and to ponder over how he can help his relationship to a Taiwanese identity develop in the future.



Figure 18: A family photo of Yizhe (top left) is taken as soon as he returns home.

Chang has transformed nostalgia into a current challenge. *Soul* portrays Taiwan under Japanese rule as an ongoing event, as Yizhe’s pursuit of self-identity epitomizes. The film opens with three scenes fading to black, with intertitles that introduce Nanfangao to audiences. Nanfangao is a fishing town to which the Japanese government recruited Japanese citizens so that they could settle there and help with construction during its rule of Taiwan. After the close of the Second World War, a small number of

Japanese chose to stay in Taiwan, for this settlement had become home. Thus, Nanfangao is revealed as a unique place that retains the most Japanese settlers after the Japanese government renounces its ownership of Taiwan. Yizhe's grandfather is one of those settlers who stayed. He was a Japanese photographer who came to Nanfangao with the Japanese settlers to document the work they had done in this fishing town. He married a Taiwanese woman to start a family of his own in Nanfangao.

After World War II, he chooses to stay in Nangfangao, as he has fallen in love with the place he has been photographing. Before the film moves to the first scene, the last intertitles reveal that this issue of torn identity between Japanese and Chinese still cuts to the heart of Yizhe's family. Figure 18 shows the family photo taken right after Yizhe and Ren return home, revealing that his parents are missing from the "family" photo. Yizhe had served time in prison on Ren's behalf after Ren fled to Japan to seek their father's help. Yizhe's father was born in and raised in Nanfangao and is the first generation in his family to receive a Mandarin education. However, it was and is difficult for him, as half Japanese, to identify with the Chinese identity cultivated by the Mandarin education he received under the authoritarian KMT regime because the KMT deliberately propagated anti-Japanese resentment. In his work, the wrestling between two major gangs had exacerbated his yearning to go to Japan, even after he insists on marrying an "indigenous" woman and having a family of his own. With help from his wife, he saves enough money to take a trip to Japan. None of his family would have expected that his focus on establishing a career in Japan would lead him to abandon his family, including his wife and children. Additionally, social discrimination against indigenous people on

the island and a single mother with two children were severe at the time. Social pressure shortly drove her to commit suicide and to leave Yizhe and his brother Ren to their grandparents, who are Japanese and not Chinese in the KMT sense.

Although the generation of Taiwanese who had survived Japanese rule is diminishing in society, the history of their era and experience is constantly revisited and reconstructed. *Soul* reveals the paradox in trying to do so by presenting the difficult reunion of Yizhe's family, where it is not entirely clear what history is supposed to be reconstructed. Yizhe grew up in a family where he was raised by grandparents and where his Japanese grandfather always served as the head of household. This family background gives us a clue to understanding the paradox of identity posed by this home. As a Japanese photographer, Yizhe's grandfather lived a life of privilege in Nanfangao during Japanese colonial rule. Even after the Japanese government renounced its ownership of Taiwan after World War II, Yizhe's grandfather did not need to face a challenge to his Japanese national identity.<sup>40</sup> He could secretly cling to his Japanese national identity and survive the authoritarian KMT regime as long as he concealed his Japanese name and behaved as his generation of Taiwanese do, which was far easier to do in a remote fishing village than it might have been in other places.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Mao Yafen, "Wenrou quanshi baoli de shendu: *Hudie* daoyan Chang Tso-Chi's fangtan," *Fangying zhoubao* (5 June 2008): n.p. [http://www.funscreen.com.tw/headline.asp?H\\_No=197](http://www.funscreen.com.tw/headline.asp?H_No=197) (accessed 5 May 2015)

<sup>41</sup> Just as the United States government published *Pocket Guide to China* (1942) to help soldiers discern their ally from their enemy in China, the KMT-led government faced a similar challenge in discerning the Taiwanese from the Japanese after the KMT relocated to Taiwan. The first national language that the Taiwanese had learned was Japanese.



Figure 19: Yizhe's father meets Yizhe's grandfather for the first time in the film.

The responsibility that comes with the privilege he had was to serve as a leader for public opinion and as a protector of the local community against any outside forces, especially during a time when the change in political rule takes place.

But this heritage is not only heroic. The first local gang was probably established under the leadership of Yizhe's grandfather, as part of his continuing commitment to Japanese culture. As an educated Japanese photographer, Yizhe's grandfather was inclined to pass down a Japanese cultural education to his only son and to assume that Yizhe's father would inherit the role of the local gang leader. When Yizhe's father takes over the gang, he faces challenges from another gang mostly composed of Chinese

migrants who had relocated to Nanfangao because of the authoritarian KMT regime. Because of the Japanese education he received from his father and his constant awareness of his Japanese ethnicity, he is inevitably driven to visit Japan, and so he seizes an opportunity that presents itself.

As Figure 19 shows, Yizhe's father actually finds his father before he negotiates his business with the head of the rival gang. After being apart for 20 years, father and son take a walk along the fishing port to enjoy their reunion. This nearly one-minute long shot captures a unique sense of intimacy shared by the father and the son. The camera follows them from behind. Instead of intruding into their space to pick up their conversation, the camera keeps its distance to observe how they keep their pace slow to enjoy this hard-earned reunion for a bit longer. As they stop to watch the view of a large waterway where the river meets the sea, the camera first pulls away from them and then slowly turns to focus on the scenery of the waterway before a fade to black ends this reunion scene. The father is pleased to meet his son again in his old age. He does not question his son's decision to go to Japan or to abandon the family, but shows him how much he loves him by forgiving the pain he has caused. It is this intimacy that the father accentuates with his son.

In contrast to this prosaic yet poetic family reunion, the reunion that Yizhe has with his father is tense and capricious. Yizhe's father loves Yizhe so much that the first thing he does as soon as he returns to Nanfangao is to set up a meeting with a close friend to ask him to give Yizhe a gift. It is a cooking knife he had used to make a living when he first arrived in Japan. Yizhe's father expresses to his friend that he considers this knife as

a legacy he wants to pass on to his first son in order to show him his fatherly love and to bind him to honor the family traditions. On a personal level, Yizhe is happy to receive this gift from his father. He secretly takes the knife out of the scabbard in his room and carefully feels the blade to imagine how his father had established his career in Japan. Still, he will not forgive his father. He ultimately refuses to accept this gift and asks Ren to return it to their father. He clearly does not want to uphold family traditions that involve moving to Japan and abandoning the rest of the family's roots.

This decision is reemphasized by what that knife-legacy signifies within his family. Ren keeps the knife and uses it to kill his rival, whom he assaulted three years before. His rival had been playing target games using a gun with a group of friends when a bullet ricocheted off its intended target and accidentally struck Ren's girlfriend, killing her. The murder that Ren commits eventually compels Yizhe to find their father for help, as it would take someone affiliated with Japan to solve the gang problem that is the other side of his family's legacy.



Figure 20: Yizhe meets with his father for the first time in film.

Since he has looked after Ren since they were little, Yizhe is accustomed to protecting Ren from the consequences of the troubles he causes. This time is no exception, except that Yizhe also needs his father's help. As Figure 20 shows, Yizhe finds his father and demands that he follow a plan that can resolve the situation—to take Ren with him and to escape to Japan immediately. The father tells Yizhe to back away from this trouble because he is their father and he will take care of it. Instead of feeling relieved, Yizhe becomes irritated for the seemingly natural fatherly stance the father assumes towards his younger son. Yizhe, who has been virtually a father to his younger brother, wants his father to explain to him why he abandoned him when he was little. The

father dodges this question but asks Yizhe instead why he hates him so much that he can ignore things he has done to make his sons proud. This conversation turns into a quarrel that can find no point of contact between the father and the son, since each of them speaks from his own point of view and asks the other to empathize with the position he has taken.

Chang presents a multigenerational family conflict that resonates far beyond this individual family. The family reunion that Yizhe's grandfather has with his father seemed peaceful, but Yizhe engages in disputes with his father as soon as they meet. Their bickering accidentally leads to a family tragedy with a particularly interesting cause. Where grandfather and father could just move past their differences (like the water flowing past them), Yizhe could not get an answer from his father to ease the pain he has suffered since he was little. But he does not have the cultural resources to ask the question in ways that might have helped. Instead, he questions his father's use of Japanese to communicate with him. This time, the father provides answers to Yizhe's question. He tells Yizhe that he considers himself Japanese, so he speaks Japanese—a language which Yizhe seems to have limited ability to comprehend but which he can use with difficulty to communicate with his father and grandfather. The father's insistence on speaking Japanese further irritates Yizhe, especially after Yizhe asks him to use Taiwanese Hokkien, a dialect that both of them speak. In a fit of rage, Yizhe pulls the trigger and shoots his father in the head when the father tells Yizhe, "I am Japanese" in Taiwanese Hokkien. Yizhe then has to reassume his role as father to his brother since he has killed their actual father, and Yizhe has to change his plans to protect Ren. He goes

after the head of the rival gang to prevent that gang from going after Ren, a vendetta which unsurprisingly leads to his death. Thus, the Japanese legacy is marked in two ways as damaging to this family, which can only meet (in an extreme emotional crisis) in Hokkien, a dialect that is *neither* Japanese nor Mandarin Chinese, but instead is a Chinese Southern Min (Min Nan) dialect with origins in Quanzhou and Zhangzhou that has forms considered indigenous to Taiwan.

The camera that captures Yizhe's reunion with his father also shows scenes that contrast with the family reunion scenes of the older generation. When Yizhe and his father begin their conversation in the atrium, the camera begins to circle around them. It stays close enough to pick up their conversation, rather than remaining at a discreet distance. At the same time, it remains distant enough to move up or away from them when their conversation turns into a quarrel. The camera's mobility in this scene creates a visual vertigo that characterizes Yizhe's reunion with his father and his murder of him, making it a dream-like occurrence. This cinematographic choice brings us to consider why the father's confession of his self-identity becomes the straw that breaks the camel's back.



Figure 21: Yizhe's father (on the right) asks his friend (on the left) to give Yizhe the cooking knife.

These two family reunions show a drastic contrast between generations that is grounded not only in personal choice, but also in history, because it is the fractured national identity among three generations of Yizhe's family has troubled Yizhe the most. This confusion about identity that Yizhe faces (Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese) may not be precisely the identity conflicts faced by his generation in Taiwan, but his story resonates enough, as many Taiwanese families have variants of these political difficulties in their family's past. As the second generation in the family to receive a Mandarin education, Yizhe finds it difficult to embrace his Chinese identity uncritically. His father

sets a model for him but he resists it. Unlike the majority of Taiwan's baby boomer generation that developed a Chinese identity, Yizhe's father is old enough to struggle between being Japanese or Chinese. The family education he receives from his Japanese father initiated his personal awareness of being ethnically Japanese, but the Mandarin education he received at school during martial law was designed to shape him into the subject of a particular form of Chinese nationalism. His move to Japan during the later part of his formative years helped to anchor his Japanese identity.

When Yizhe's father appears on the screen, he always dresses formally, combs his hair neatly, and speaks Japanese. In the scene where Yizhe's father meets with his old friend in Nanfangao, as Figure 21 shows, he speaks Japanese to his friend and asks his personal translator to translate what he says into Taiwanese Hokkien. This is how he communicates with his sons in private as well. His deliberate use of Japanese manners distinguishes him from his own generation of Taiwanese as well as from his sons' generation. This distinction troubles Yizhe because he also faces difficulty in considering himself to be Chinese. But for Yizhe, there is more to it than simply picking one choice—Japanese—and giving up the other—Chinese, as his father had done. As Yizhe angrily roars at his grandfather and father, he does not know how to communicate with them in Japanese.

The historical references here are very clear. During Yizhe's formative years in Taiwan, the KMT-led Chinese nation and the Chinese national identity it promoted had been greatly questioned, as the first generation of NTC directors demonstrated in their films about Taiwan under Japanese rule. Their films were designed to shift the Taiwanese

audience's focus back to the history of the land in which they have resided for generations. In other words, the Mandarin education that Yizhe received predisposed him to reject the Japanese culture with which his father identified, but it also did not help him to shape his own Chinese national identity. It instead raised more questions about it.<sup>42</sup> However, the idea of nationalism deliberately cultivated by Taiwan's Mandarin education, with a government on the island independent from that of Mainland China and a social milieu of changing political reforms, encouraged Yizhe and his generation of Taiwanese to develop a different national identity, one that resists being subsumed under a form of Chinese nationalism that references the Mainland.

### **Locating the Structures of Feeling: Narrative, Memory, and Identity**

Yizhe's family issues and the gang troubles in which he is involved epitomize the history of Taiwan under Japanese rule and its continuing influence on Nanfangao. On the film's most overt level, this history overshadows Yizhe's search for his identity, but gradually, the film shows the audience how, during his search, he has actually participated in producing an identity that intertwines his idea of self and that of the nation.

The idea I am proposing here is closer to Erving Goffman's conception of presenting one's self in the practice of everyday life and Judith Butler's model of how one constructs one's (gender) identity as performativity—in Yizhe's case, his revisiting of

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<sup>42</sup> Jens, Damm. "From 'overseas Chinese' to 'overseas Taiwanese'": questions of identity and belonging. *Taiwanese Identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 221-229.

locations from his childhood and his act of telling stories about little Yizhe. By telling stories about little Yizhe and memorializing his deceased mother, Yizhe begins to construct his *narrative identity*. Because of the different generations' experience with politics, as we have seen, such identity construction will differ widely across the various generations in contemporary Taiwan.<sup>43</sup> Yet, when an individual consciously participates in such acts of identity construction, he will see himself both in the context of history and as an individual in itself and for itself.<sup>44</sup> As Ruth Benedict described in her *Patterns of Culture* (1934), this awareness of one's individuality does not remove an individual from the society in which he is situated, but it instead reveals the ongoing and constant competition between an individual and his society.

In Taiwan's context, the trend of individuals becoming aware of identities and participating autonomously in constructing a collective consensus about Taiwanese identity is shared by generations of Taiwanese. This call to establish a collective identity is driven in no small part by the fear that memories and personal histories will disappear, the kind of loss most individuals have already experienced in the changes of political regimes throughout the history of modern Taiwan.<sup>45</sup> At the turn of the new millennium, the global cultural flows embodied by the rising influence of Mainland Chinese power in the region, which threatens to annex the island's government, only aggravates this fear. This fear is also what drives Yizhe and his generation of Taiwanese to develop their identification with reference to Taiwan, the land they and their family have resided in for

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<sup>43</sup> Wang Fu-chang, "Minzu xiangxiang, zuqun yishi yu lishi—*Renshi Taiwan* jiaokeshu zhengyi fengbo de neirong yumailuo fenxi," *Taiwanshi yanjiu* 8.2 (2001.12): 192.

<sup>44</sup> Huang Junjie, *Taiwan yishi yu Taiwan wenhua* (Taipei: Taiwan daxue chubanshe, 2006), 176-177.

<sup>45</sup> Sylvia Li-chun Lin, *Representing Atrocity in Taiwan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 3.

generations. How to further the development of this emerging national identity in the future brings them to reexamine Taiwan's relationship to Japan as a way to counterbalance the increasing Chinese political and economic influence on Taiwanese society.<sup>46</sup>

Since the early 2000s, a second group of local film productions addressing Taiwan under the Japanese rule have also been well-received by Taiwanese audiences.<sup>47</sup> Many of these films are documentaries that attempt to preserve the memories and experiences of the older generation that is passing away in Taiwan by embodying them in the protagonists' personal histories, memories, and experiences with Japanese rule. In contrast to the long-familiar narratives centering on how the Japanese government exploited and oppressed the Taiwanese during their rule by means of the colonial system, these new films craft a more positive image of the Japanese in Taiwan.<sup>48</sup> These films document the protagonists' personal histories, memories, and experiences of Japanese rule. They show these protagonists' embracing their own experiences of Japanese cultural presence in everyday life, especially in the forms of popular music and dancing.<sup>49</sup> The narratives of personal stories relating to positive experiences with Japanese culture have helped the middle generation—the first wave of baby boomers—reconstruct its own history as a counterbalance to the long-standing official narrative that endorses the

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<sup>46</sup> China's continuous attempts to marginalize Taiwan in the international arena exacerbate this discrimination that generations of the Taiwanese have held against the Chinese government. *Mingzhong ribao* (21 march 1996), n.p.

<sup>47</sup> These films include *Viva Tonal* (2003), *Let it Be* (2004), *Cape No. 7* (2008), and *Taiwan jinsei* (2009), etc.

<sup>48</sup> Lin Yijun, "shuxie de duanlie: riben jiyi zai Taiwan de zhuanhuan." *Taiwan xuezhishi* 7 (2013.4): 90.

Chinese KMT-led government's rule on the island. This act of narrating the diminishing generation's personal experiences has become commonplace in Taiwan, almost as an epidemic, dating from the time when the first generation of NTC directors began doing so during the 1980s. This epidemic trend will naturally draw the audiences' attention to the narratives alluded to by Yizhe's story.

As those scenes of the troubled reunions have demonstrated, the male-dominated patriarchy of Yizhe's family foreshadows the impending violence and family tragedy. Yizhe sacrifices his own life to save Ren's life. His act, claiming an eye for an eye, implies his attempt to establish his status within his male-dominated family and nation-state through violent confrontations, as it is the only method he can think of to make sure his brother is safe. Yizhe had rejected the offer from his gang offer to lead them again after his release from prison. He also rejected his father's gift to him in order to demonstrate his decision to move away from a gang life, a common representation of the patriarchal hierarchy. Still, his world cannot be freed from these influences, and thus he chooses a one-man strike to murder the head of the rival gang, which, unsurprisingly, leads to his death.



Figure 22: Yizhe was hunted down and called out his death cry in a bamboo grove.

This scene of Yizhe's death occurs at a place that had been his favorite when he was a child, a choice which underscores how much his past has determined his choices. This is an abandoned playground where his father used to take him to watch butterflies fluttering all over the sky. Yizhe's death is also met by butterflies fluttering around in the bamboo grove, recalling the happy memories he shared there with his father, as an imagery for death. Here we have another duplicitous image: in Taiwanese aboriginal culture, butterflies are associated with souls, and large numbers of butterflies can be taken as bad omens. This portrayal of his death, though visually romanticized, thus again raises the question of whether or not it's possible to construct another male-dominated home and country where Yizhe's generation of Taiwanese can find a place to settle down.

Taking such a nationalist narrative as the basis for a personal film has not been without its problems, even in Chang's work as a second-generation NTC filmmaker. As noted above, ideas of nationalism remained prevalent in the public sphere established by the first generation of NTC directors and by discussions about them and their films.<sup>50</sup> With production assistance from the state-owned CMPC and support for attending international film festivals, the NTC had indeed helped the reconstruction of Taiwan as an entity whose government and history are independent from those of both Japan and Mainland China. At the same time, their films became great examples of how cultural products can help audiences to imagine a nation-state. Yet, critiques of this construction of the nation-state through the establishment of the NTC as a new kind of national cinema also arose from a different camp in the same public sphere. Members of this camp claimed that these films were nothing new and that they simply shared the typical critiques coming from socialist perspectives of the nation. In his "All for whose tomorrow" (*yiqie wei sheide mingtian*), for example, media scholar Ning Yin-Bing argues that this construction would perpetuate class domination.<sup>51</sup>

It is not clear whether Chang Tso-Chi is conscious about this socialist critique, but his meticulous construction of a non-linear narrative in *Soul* responds to the critique that NTC films perpetuate class domination. The non-linear narrative that he builds into the film reinforces how questionable it is to construct a male-dominated home and country whose continuity relies on producing generations of offspring. It also reveals the

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<sup>50</sup> Chiang Huey Hsien, *Taiwan dianying, guozu xushi yuxingbie zhengzhi: tan gulingjie shaonian sharen shijian* (Taipei: Fu Jen Catholic University, 1993).

<sup>51</sup> Ning Yin-Bing, "yiqie 'wei sheide mingtian'?" *Xindianying zhisi* (Taipei: Tangshan, 1991), 64.

relationships in Yizhe's story that condition his search for a narrative identity. This non-linear narrative that the film actually offers consists of two parts: a female voiceover and Yizhe's fragmented narratives about his mother, the one indigenous Taiwanese member of his family.



Figure 23: Pei is writing in her diary. In her diary, she writes down what Yizhe says to her and her interpretation of his sayings.

The female voiceover is provided by Pei, Yizhe's girlfriend, who became mute after her first pregnancy—which occurred with her ex-boyfriend—ended in a miscarriage. She never speaks on-screen, but her narration often appears from outside the screen to reveal what Yizhe had said to her or what she thinks Yizhe's statements might

imply to the audience. After the intertitles on the black screen at the start of the film, for example, her narration first appears as a voice over the solid black screen before it cuts to the first shot, a 55-second long shot that moves slowly to reveal Nanfangao's landscape at dawn. As soon as her narration finishes in the second shot, the camera zooms out of its take on the fishing port to disclose the source of that information, Pei sitting in her room. Pei is finishing up her sewing work and looking out of her window while she takes a break. The next shot shows her diary lying on the desk, with its pages flipping in the breeze. Pei's narration opens Yizhe's story, and her perspective calls it into question:

Yizhe, you said you wanted to go somewhere that you could be invisible. Like a traveler from far away. Arriving at will, leaving at will, remembering nothing. You liked the silence. In this rainy fishing port, this place Nanfangao, your lovely hometown. (Chang's *Soul of a Demon*)

After Yizhe's death, this narrative reappears on the landscape shot of Nanfangao, before the film cuts to the scene of the funeral ceremony that ends Yizhe's story. Her narration also emerges from the screen when Yizhe visits the bamboo grove with her. Whenever they show up in the grove, Yizhe always remains silent. He never speaks about his memories of his father. In the scenes where Yizhe brings Pei to visit these places from his childhood, he always remains quiet and meditative—these places do not have narratives in his mind. It is Pei's narration that gives Yizhe's visits to these scenes their narrative form. Pei's narrative reveals Yizhe's emotional attachment to his father through the memories they shared in the grove. This female voiceover gives narratives that construct Yizhe's identity from a more local perspective. As these narratives reveal his emotional

attachment to his father and the location of this memory, they also present Yizhe's identity to the audience as a consistent construction in a stable narrative form.

This point is not a random observation. When Yizhe prepares to visit his mother's tomb on the anniversary of her death, for example, his tongue becomes loosened to give fragmented narratives about his mother, but there is an important contrast between Yizhe's narrative and the scene shown to the audience. His narration often takes place as a voiceover, but the events presented during the same scene often run in contradiction to his narratives. Figure 24 shows the first time that Yizhe talks about his mother as he tells the story of how his parents met.



Figure 24: Yizhe tells the story of how his parents met and established a family without a wedding ceremony.

When his narrative arrives at the point where his mother is willing to marry his father without a wedding ceremony due to the disapproval of Yizhe's grandmother, Yizhe looks over at a group of people preparing for a wedding ceremony on the middle-right part of the screen. A bride and a groom are in their wedding attire doing a photo shoot. Yizhe's narrative about how his mother copes with his father's abandonment then continues from outside of the scene as the next shot cuts to capture that bride and the groom finishing their photo shoot and leaving the scene.

This contrast between Yizhe's narrative and the events occurring on the screen continues in the next few shots and into the scenes that document his visit to Orchid Island. According to Yizhe's narrative, he has returned to Orchid Island to commemorate his mother's death. Yet his conversation with a group of the locals on the island reveals that his return is actually the closing point of his search for his own identity in terms of his patriarchal heritage. As soon as he and Pei arrive on the island, they walk up to a group of locals and ask them where Shimaderun is. As Figure 24 shows, this group of indigenous children honestly answer that they have never heard of Shimaderun.

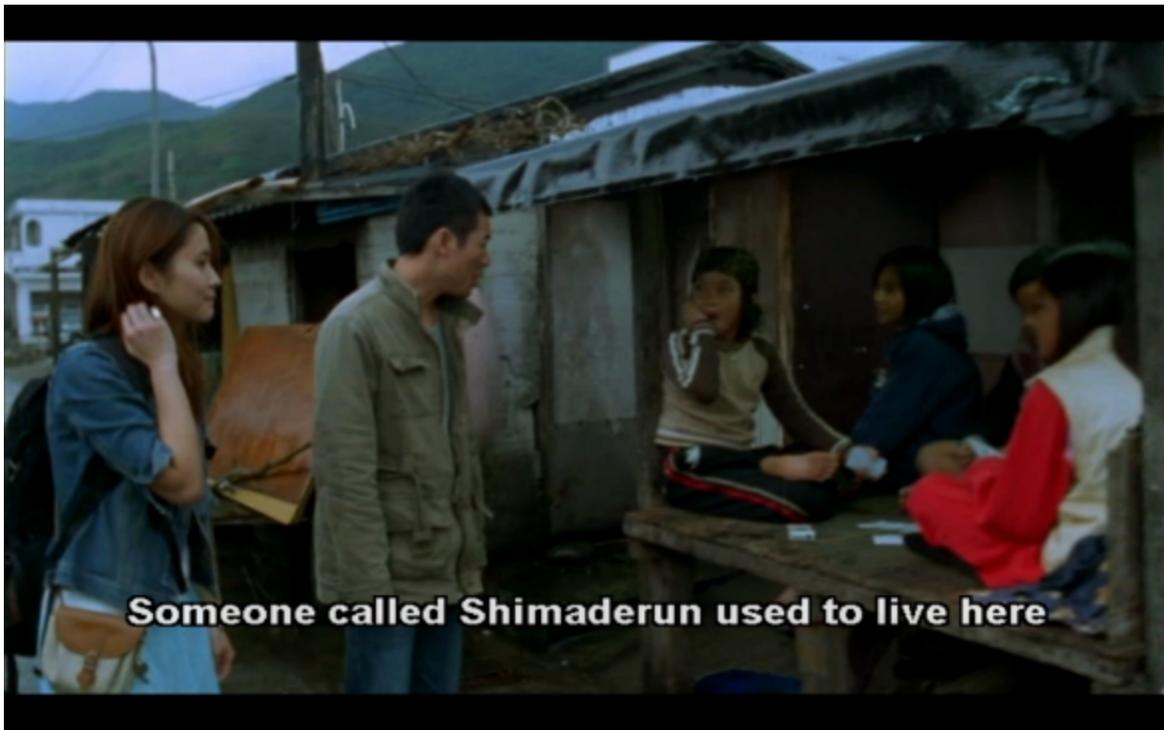


Figure 25: Yizhe asks a group of indigenous children, local to Orchid Island, about a person named Shimaderun.

Yizhe asks a group of indigenous elders the same question, hoping that the answer will be different. They give him the same answer and stress that Shimaderun has vanished. It is at the tomb of Yizhe's mother when his narrative about his mother discloses that Shimaderun is his indigenous name, given to him when he was little. Yizhe is Shimaderun, but Shimaderun does not belong here anymore—he is not remembered. This is the point where his narrative about his mother connects to his search for himself; it reveals that his narration has enabled him to construct him a narrative identity. This scene also appeals to the Taiwanese imperative of the era, underscoring how important it is for

three generations of Taiwanese to tell their stories, both from the political and personal or familial sides. Their autonomous acts of telling stories bestow on them a kind of social agency that can be realized only when they constantly examine and reexamine the relationship between their personal memories and society. Yizhe dies when he fails to break out of his father's and grandfather's narrative dilemmas and find a third way, something beyond “an eye for an eye,” which is the traditional construction of a male-dominated national history.

## **Conclusion**

Up to this point in my discussion, I have examined the history of Taiwanese films through the lens of Chang Tso-Chi's career as a director, focusing particularly on the political implications embedded in the anti-Japanese war films that were part of official popular culture and in films about Taiwan under Japanese rule that the NTC innovated into the space of cinema viewing. This discussion was conducted in light of the formation of different generations of audience groups and how two generations of NTC directors have carried on the task of cultivating a group of local film audiences to sustain the emerging public sphere.

Chang's *Soul* argues for a more complex case—that such a public sphere is significant. Creating artwork becomes for him and his peers also an act of participating in social movements that continue to promote socialist critiques within Taiwanese society. In the context of the development of New Taiwanese Cinema, this participation seems to closely intertwine with the making of a Taiwanese identity, one that today often

still remains subsumed under Chinese cultural norms. Yet, by implicating the formation of Taiwanese identity with political and personal narratives, Chang shows how this idea of narrative identity gives us a new understanding of the social agency that Yizhe seeks and finds when he examines his past. This character fails to break away from the path of his past, however, leaving it to the audience to speculate about society and the path he would have had to take to continue this formation. This ongoing trend presents Taiwanese cinema as an interesting case study in the first half of the twenty-first century, which I will turn to in the conclusion of this study.

## **Conclusion**

### **Persistent Resistance from the Margin**

This project has examined four films produced during the first half of Chang Tso-Chi's career as a second-generation NTC director. These analyses center on the position of these works within the development of the NTC that demonstrate Taiwan's film culture from the mid-1990s to 2008 and the changing dynamics of finance and audience that it confronted. These analyses especially shed light on the changing relationship that contemporary Taiwanese audiences have had with the NTC and Taiwan's film culture and what the changes in that relationship show about Taiwan's unique approach to filmmaking in the Asia Pacific.

My results suggest that this self-awareness of a film culture of their own had begun to take root in Taiwanese audiences' consumption and evaluation of films since the mid-1990s. This increasing self-awareness, I have argued, has been critical for the construction of Taiwanese cinema based upon audience reception of local film productions. According to the *Taiwan Cinema Year Book*, specifically the data about Taiwan's film market published between 2008 and 2013, the number of Taiwanese film

productions has climbed up on the annual chart steadily.<sup>1</sup> Their box office performance also has increased to include one-fifth of the local market share.<sup>2</sup>

This film renaissance that I have documented continues, an ongoing process in Taiwanese society during the time of my writing. The local film productions that break box office records for Chinese-language cinema in Taiwan's film market have received and continue to receive most of the media attention. Yet, the attention these films have attracted in Taiwan has also helped a new generation of filmmakers to emerge, represented here by Chang Tso-Chi, who has stayed in the local film production industry through the recession years, raising his own funding for filmmaking. After 2008, Chang produces four more films that continue to receive critical acclaim at international film festivals and that have moderate box office success in the local film market.<sup>3</sup>

During this period of Taiwan's film renaissance, Chang chose to remain on the margins of the commercial or subsidized film production models he inherited. Where he places his work, he is able to secure freedom of production norms and promote his films through the circuit of international film festivals.<sup>4</sup> In his most recent interview at Berlin, for example, he defines his productions as "ordinary films" (*tongshupian*), in contrast to "vulgar films" (*yongshupian*), a distinction clearly meant to differentiate between

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<sup>1</sup> *Taiwan Cinema Year Book* always includes at least one analysis of Taiwanese cinema's box office performance each year. My observation is based on these analyses.

<sup>2</sup> Yan Peihua, "Weng Mingxian: Taiwan dianying guanzhong huilaile," *Lianhe wanbao* (2 March 2012): A4.

<sup>3</sup> The four films are *How Are You, Dad?* (2009), *When Love Comes* (2010), *A Time in Quchi* (2013) and *Thanatos, Drunk* (2015).

<sup>4</sup> Liu Ying, "dujia zhuanfang Chang Tso-Chi: huanxiang shi yuwang de dongli," 106.

traditional film festival entries and blatantly commercial cinema.<sup>5</sup> As he well knows, both kinds of films explore issues commonly seen in Taiwanese families, but the narratives of Chang's films are so stylistically distinctive that they often confront their audiences with challenges. Such audience challenges achieve concrete forms when they are quantified in the form of box office tickets by Taiwan's mass media today. Nonetheless, Chang insists on producing a different kind of film—one that, given his control of production costs, can always recuperate the investment and that can win acclaim by critics as well as niche-audiences. Thus, he insists on occupying a position that guarantees him maximum artistic freedom in his work while subsisting in a heavily commodified medium.

By way of conclusion, let me return once more to this position—on the margin—to evaluate the evolution of the NTC in its original and global contexts in order to reinforce the new but still popular cinema that grew out of the NTC's role in the current film renaissance in Taiwan, and argue it as a reconstruction of a new kind of national cinema today.

### **Of Another Cinema**

Twenty years after the NTC manifesto was published, Chang Tso-Chi and his cinema offer us a reference point for understanding how it is possible to continue developing “another cinema” (*lingyizhong dianying*) in Taiwan.<sup>6</sup> The laws of the market that came to dominate Taiwan's film production industry since the lifting of martial law

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<sup>5</sup> Liu Ying, “dujia zhuanfang Chang Tso-Chi: huanxiang shi yuwang de dongli,” 107.

<sup>6</sup> Jan Hung-Tze, “Mingguo qishiliu nian Taiwan dianying xuanyan—gei lingyizhong dianying yige cunzai de kongjian,” 8.

has indeed significantly reduced direct political interference in the island's film industry. This manifesto positions the NTC in Taiwanese society, hoping to initiate with this new cinema the development of film as a culture rather than a product, thus making it at least somewhat resistant to the laws of the market. Speaking not only of film itself but also of the film industry as a whole, that manifesto also identifies three social groups—governmental units, mass media, and the film review system—and their relationship to the development of this new cinema.<sup>7</sup> The first generation of NTC directors and their followers, who all share this value of considering film more as a culture than as a product, have joined together to sustain the development of this new cinema. Their manifesto and their practice document their awareness of needing to work together with these three social groups in society if this cinema is to survive.

It would be too simplistic to describe these directors' success in terms of a simple statement acknowledging that Taiwanese audiences have returned to embrace local film productions—this could hardly help us understand the recent film renaissance as an ongoing social and aesthetic project. The recent boom in Taiwanese film productions and the growth of their box office performance suggest that Taiwan's filmmakers and the three social groups have established a working relationship to make possible a local popular cinema. Many local blockbusters constitute the public face of this popular cinema because they are the foci of Taiwan's mass media. This side of the NTC's public face demonstrates that the logic of running a film production as a business continues to dominate the recent boom. Nonetheless, the domination of blockbusters could be

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

deceptive, misleading us to conclude that the NTC has failed in its task of promoting film as a culture more than a product.

That conclusion emerges as erroneous if we fail to examine the relationship between the recent Taiwanese film renaissance and the development of the second generation of the NTC, whose survival continues to depend on support from governmental units and the film review system. With their support, the first and second generations of NTC directors remained able to sustain film productions during the recession—the 1990s and the early 2000s—when the number of Taiwan’s film productions decreased to a record low.<sup>8</sup> They become the only group who sustained film production during this time, as they worked to secure Taiwan's cinema’s place in the global film festival market. Their films garnered not only attention from a small group of local audiences who followed local film productions and their reception at international film festivals. More importantly, they also cultivated traditions for younger generations of film directors to follow. The younger generations of Taiwanese filmmakers making their film debuts more recently have sustained this film renaissance, which is evidence of the influence on them of films made by the first and second generations of NTC directors.<sup>9</sup> When asked about their relationship to the NTC, a film movement used as a point of reference in Taiwan’s film industry and film review system, these new directors

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<sup>8</sup> Lin Wen-Chi, “Yinwei dui dianying de reai,” 7.

<sup>9</sup> Lin Shu-Yu, “Zhencang meihao yu ganshang—zhuangfang *Jiujiangfeng* daoyan Lin Shu-Yu yu zhujue Chang Chieh,” *Fangying zhoubao* 157 (15 May 2008), [http://www.funscreen.com.tw/headline.asp?H\\_No=194](http://www.funscreen.com.tw/headline.asp?H_No=194) (accessed on 8 June 2015).

tend to openly agree on the influences.<sup>10</sup> Younger generations of Taiwanese filmmakers may not claim to be direct heirs of the first generation NTC directors, but they have embraced this value of film as central to culture, as the first generation NTC directors tried to promote. Thus, that principle is an established consensus among the younger groups of directors. This acknowledgement redefines the first generation of NTC directors as encompassing not only capital, but also cultural capital in the sphere of Taiwan's film culture, which is situated in the Asian Pacific sphere.

To be sure, within this recent “boom,” the older and younger generations of NTC directors still remain on the margins in terms of total production numbers and the size and diversity of their audience groups. Nonetheless, as Chang Tso-Chi's case demonstrates, these films put on the screen Taiwan and its society—those who struggle to survive on the lower rungs of the social class ladder, confronting the issues these socio-economic minorities wrestle with.<sup>11</sup> These films, including feature films and documentaries, may not stand out for their impressive box office performances but they have been and are still able to garner attention from local audience groups that have grown slowly and steadily over the past three decades.<sup>12</sup> The slow yet steady growth of local audience groups who continue to watch local film productions suggests that the development of the NTC is maturing to include films that serve a dual role as both a

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<sup>10</sup> This observation comes from reading and interpreting these directors' interviews. Collections of these interviews and their film reviews were published during the recent film renaissances. Please see *The Voice of Taiwan Cinema* (2010), for example.

<sup>11</sup> Wu Yi-Feng's *Gift of Life* (2003), Zero Chou's *Drifting Flowers* (2008), and Yang Ya-Che's *Orz Boyz* (2008), etc.

<sup>12</sup> This observation comes from the steady box office performances of films dedicated to disclosing social issues. *Taiwan Cinema Year Book* publishes an annual report about Taiwanese film productions.

product of the entertainment industry and a specific site in culture—as Chang Tso-Chi’s cinema has demonstrated.

### **Chang Tso-Chi and East Asia**

The first-generation NTC directors as well as their audiences staked out a marginal position in the sphere of Taiwan’s film production; the second generation continues to do so but pursues this position differently from the older generation. Chang Tso-Chi has demonstrated that he is one of the followers who shares the value of filmmaking as a social practice, as his predecessors promoted. This value of film as culture motivates him to debut his films in Taiwan and to continue producing films within Taiwan’s film production industry during a difficult financial period when many Taiwanese film directors ceased filmmaking. At the same time, adhering to these values in the 1990s and the 2000s forced him to also take into consideration how to promote his film as a product—a challenge the older generation of NTC directors may not have had to face. But Chang has found a way in today’s media climate to address both aesthetic and commercial forces in his filmmaking.

Remember that Chang Tso-Chi’s career as a film director parallels the rise of international film festivals in East Asia.<sup>13</sup> These film festivals comprise an intra-regional network that facilitates the circulation of films produced by each economic and political entity in the region. The popular reception that Japanese and Korean films have garnered

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<sup>13</sup> The Hong Kong International Film Festival, Busan International Film Festival, and Tokyo International Film Festival are particularly prominent in the region.

among Taiwanese audience groups in Taiwan's film market since the 1990s is a product of this network.<sup>14</sup> The regional market established by these East Asian international film festivals makes it easier to network with another regional market—western international film festivals—with the two networks often exchanging award-winning films selected by each of the networks and thus facilitating the trans-regional reception of these films.

The four Chang Tso-Chi films that I have examined in previous chapters won international acclaim at these regional niche-market festivals before they returned to Taiwan and its local audiences. Whether they followed the route of East Asia-Taiwan-West or of West-East Asia-Taiwan, the trajectory of audience reception for Chang's films through this East Asian film festival network represents an alternative form of globalization where Taiwan and its neighboring economic and political entities are bound within East Asia as a region. In this alternative form of globalization, Taiwan comes to be understood as a hub that facilitates the flow of trans-regional cultural products.

Chang's films are not the first cultural commodities circulating in this market. The popular circulation of Japanese and Korean audio-visual products only became possible when audience groups from each regional economic and political entity actively consumed these regional popular cultural products to develop a self-identity and relationship with its Asian neighbors.<sup>15</sup> Today, Taiwanese audiences' active consumption of Japanese and Korean cultural products helps their circulation in the Greater China

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<sup>14</sup> Tseng Yi-Chu, "*qiye kuaitan xuanfeng: fenxi quanqiu riben kongbu dianying fengchao*," *Wenhua yanjiu yuebao* (25 May 2005) [http://csat.org.tw/csa/journal/46/journal\\_park359.htm#b6](http://csat.org.tw/csa/journal/46/journal_park359.htm#b6) (accessed on 10 June 2015)

<sup>15</sup> Chua Beng Huat and Koichi Iwabuchi, "Introduction: East Asian TV Dramas: Identification, Sentiments and Effects," 8.

region and makes Taiwan an indispensable nodal point in imagining East Asia as a region comprising several cultures, not only Japan for its pop culture or Mainland China for its films. In turn, Taiwanese audiences' reception of local film productions—such as Chang Tso-Chi and his cinema—also helps these Taiwanese films circulate in the region, promoting a new understanding of Taiwan in this emerging East Asian circuit that globalizes culture in new ways.

Chang Tso-Chi consciously uses his films to reach out to this intra-regional network of East Asian film festivals. This reaching out to international audience groups in East Asia is significant for him as he makes films that carry on the NTC as a social movement in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The NTC, considered as a social movement, seems to have failed the first generation of like-minded filmmakers and their followers. As the result of the publication of the NTC manifesto in 1987 shows, many like-minded filmmakers of the first-generation NTC directors actually left the film production industry to find other livelihoods. In 1996, Edward Yang, one of the first-generation NTC directors, commented on this dismal situation as a beginning to the closure of an epoch.<sup>16</sup>

However, as a second-generation NTC director, Chang Tso-Chi and his cinema reveal a silver lining to this dismal situation, showing us that it may be too early to conclude that the NTC is a failure simply due to the extraordinarily small scale on which it had its impact, as this impact is small-scale in financial terms only, not in cultural terms. Like his predecessors, Chang Tso-Chi still insists on occupying a marginal

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<sup>16</sup> Chang Jinn-Pei, *Ningwang shidai: chuanyue beiqing chengshi ershinian*, 105.

position because such a position offers him an agency to resist the dominant market-driven ideology that continues to be rampant in Taiwan's film industry today, as that ideology stresses profits as opposed to cultural impact. What Chang Tso-Chi has done in accepting a degree of commercial marginalization reflects the kind of challenge that many advocates of social movements face in their original contexts. What he brings to the screen is modern Taiwan, a part of East Asia that shares certain social issues associated with the experience of modernization throughout the region. Yet, these issues are also resolutely Taiwanese in the sense that he admits how the political power in the region has shifted between Mainland China and Japan, but without eliminating the distinct identities of other East Asian cultural groups.

Situating Chang Tso-Chi's cinema in this context, as I have done, demonstrates how critical it is for older and younger generations of Taiwanese filmmakers to occupy a marginal position in the field of film production. If they can balance cultural and commercial forces, they can continue making films that advocate for social reforms from within their society. The ability to make such statements showing how East Asia's dominant and less dominant cultures interact can only become possible when these films are able reach international audiences in the region. Just as importantly, these films specifically advocate social reforms for those who subsist on the lower echelons of the social class, those existing on the margins of globalized culture production.

In this sense, the case of Chang Tso-Chi documents the development of an Asian cinema that is also built on audiences' reception of these films within its region, not only in terms of the system of global cultural capital that Hollywood films and European film

festivals represent. Two generations of the NTC have managed to profile themselves apart from the global capital system of international blockbuster films and to create an audience for a new kind of East Asian film culture.

### **Reconsidering National Cinema**

At international film festivals, whether they are held in the west or in East Asia, the NTC has become and remains Taiwan's national brand. This emphasis on national branding, as I have delineated above, is a result of encounters between world cinema and local cinema, each of which has its own set of traditions to follow and histories to (re)construct. This competition for national brands at international film festivals, however, suggests that we need to reconsider what national cinema means.

In Taiwan's context, any search for a national brand highlights the continuous anxiety about how to position Taiwan and its culture in the twenty-first century. The state apparatus—a dynamic organism—continues to ensure a leading role for the NTC. The state supported the rise of the NTC and the first generation of NTC directors by offering film subsidies to encourage local film productions and to help promote local film productions at international film festivals. Chang Tso-Chi's cinema demonstrates the most recent trends of film production in Taiwan, as his generation resists the state apparatus' dominance in presenting a dominant nationalist narrative. He does make the best use of the organized system established by the state to promote his films through the network of local film festivals that arose around the same time that the East Asian international film festivals began to form a cultural network separate from the “world”

festivals in Europe. These local film festivals have begun to compete with the state-associated networks and to assume leading roles in the region's cultural production.<sup>17</sup>

Chang Tso-Chi's cinema has demonstrated this balance for older and younger generation NTC directors and filmmakers from the region. Through his attention to the audience and to his national film traditions, Chang highlights a possible method for sustaining filmmaking as a local and critical social practice in the first half of the twenty-first century, establishing a clear new national voice within homogenized capitalist networks of global film.

### **Future Directions: Scholarship on the NTC and its Descendants**

This project has offered the first scholarly address of Chang Tso-Chi's cinema in any detail. However, Chang's career is ongoing, and thus his most recent films wait to be added to this consideration of his cinema. The result will be a study on how challenging cinema can still be made with mass audiences in mind and on how the NTC has interacted with its audiences.

Future research in this direction would also require reevaluating how New Taiwanese Cinema should be read as a social movement continued by Chang and a group of documentary filmmakers who tend to be overlooked in discussions about the NTC. This approach to the NTC corresponds to the rise of various civil right movements in East Asian societies during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As chapter 3 has demonstrated, the making of Taiwanese identity becomes a social consensus that often

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<sup>17</sup> Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival, Taipei Film Festival and Kaohsiung Film Festival are examples.

instigates heated debates in newsworthy events. Many contemporary Taiwanese directors use these events to make feature films or docudrama films. A series of these films have garnered enough audience attention and made it to television news reports during the recent years of Taiwan's film renaissance.

Chang's employment of documentaries in his feature films demonstrates that he is part of this emerging trend and draws our attention to a group of documentary film directors who began and have sustained filmmaking when many of Chang's peers, feature film directors, ceased filmmaking. This direction will take into consideration contemporary Taiwanese cinema as a field of culture production.

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